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FLORENCE SACKVILLE;

OR,

SELF-DEPENDENCE.

An Autobiography.

BY MRS. BURBURY.

"Is it the tender star of love?
The star of love and dreams?
O no! from that blue tent above,
A hero's armor gleams.

* * * * *
"O star of strength! I see thee stand,
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand,
And I am strong again.

* * * * *

"The star of the unconquered will,
He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And calm and self-possessed.

* * * * *
"O! fear not, in a world like this,
And thou shalt know, ere long,
Know how sublime a thing it is,
To suffer and be strong."

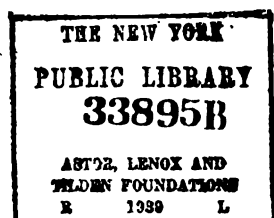
"*The Light of Stars.*"—By H. W. LONGFELLOW

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

82 CLIFF STREET.

MDCCCLII.



DEDICATION.

TO SAMUEL ROGERS, ESQ.

MY DEAR SIR :

WITH the dedication of this work, pray accept my earnest thanks for the high honor you have done me, in thus affording my first novel the protection of your distinguished name ; and suffer me, at the same time, to express the sincere gratification I feel in embracing this opportunity of acknowledging—not altogether as they deserve, but in the best way that I am able—the wise counsel and friendly interest to which I am so deeply indebted.

The subject of the tale was suggested to me more than two years since by a literary friend, who fancied that it was one I might succeed in rendering amusing ; and it has been written during the intervals of long and severe illnesses : of the variable spirits produced by which, it bears, I fear, despite my best endeavors, but too much evidence.

In you I *know* that I shall find an indulgent judge ; and in throwing myself upon the mercy of an English public, I can only entreat my readers to believe that, whatever faults may disfigure this my first attempt at novel-writing, the merit of an earnest wish to please them has not been wanting.

The form of an autobiography was chosen as that best suited to the subject ; because it afforded the author a better opportunity of expressing in the most natural way, the emotions and experiences of a girl placed in the difficult circumstances of Florence Sackville. My first intention was to have taken leave of the heroine upon her accession to fortune ; but in this I was overruled by the advice of those whom I felt it an honor to obey, and therefore the *catastrophe* was altered to its present form.

With heartfelt prayers for the peaceful prolongation of a long and honored life, passed in the enjoyment of those rare intellectual powers which have shed an undying lustre over English literature, believe me to remain,

My dear Sir,

Your most faithful and obliged servant,

E. J. BURBURY.

WOR 19 FEB '36

FLORENCE SACKVILLE;

OR,

SELF-DEPENDENCE.

CHAPTER I.

It was on a wild and stormy night of a bitter December, that I was born. My birthplace was an Irish town in Galway; and for many weeks, I was hushed to sleep by the roaring of the lake over which my nursery hung. My father was a young Irish officer; my mother an English woman, who, captivated by his handsome face and chivalrous bearing, waltzed off with him one night from her godfather's house in London: and while it was supposed they were admiring the flowers in the conservatory, the happy pair were as far on the north road as the speed of four horses could hurry them.

Fortunately for the runaways, my mother was the youngest and favorite child of her parents, who tried to forget, in their love for her, that her husband was a spendthrift, and, if report spoke truly, a gambler also. Not many weeks after the hasty and ill-considered marriage, Alice Vere, now Mrs. Sackville, found that she had placed herself at the mercy of a man whose violent and jealous temper, wholly beyond his own control, rendered her miserable. The slightest provocation, and often no provocation at all, was sufficient to transport him beyond the bounds of reason; and, at such times, she would sit trembling before him until the paroxysm was past, or till he left her in a frenzy. Still she loved him; for, when the storm was over, there was a charm in his manner, and an eloquence in his voice, that were irresistible. Her feminine vanity, too, was enlisted on his side; for certainly, when at the head of his men, or doing the honors of the ball-room to the guests of the —th, there was no man she had ever seen who could compare with him. He was a gallant soldier, too, and idolized by the peasantry, for whom he was always ready to do a service; as he loved popularity, and liked people to see the influence he held over the wild denizens of mountain and bog.

For a time all this helped to reconcile my mother to her lot; but scarcely six months elapsed, after her marriage, ere she found her society deserted for the billiard-table, and her conversation rudely avoided or silenced, whenever, as was now daily the case, her husband could spend his time more agreeably in discussing and betting upon the next steeple-chase or Curragh races.

There was in Alice Sackville's nature a great leaven of obstinacy and pride; therefore, she

soon ceased to soothe and conciliate her husband, and tried to play off her indifference and contempt against his fits of passion and neglect. This was very sad, for in their hearts they still loved each other; and, although both took a strange way of showing it, there was, even at this time, enough of their first affection left to constitute, if rightly managed, a fund to draw upon through life. But Pride, their great arch-enemy, whispered to them always, and was cherished as a faithful counselor by both: so that when Love and Memory pleaded in their hearts for gentleness and forbearance toward each other, he would say to Alice, "Don't relent! don't smile, or play his favorite music! He will behave as ill to-morrow, and then how you will have lowered your dignity. No! show a proper spirit, and teach him that you are as indifferent as he is." Then this same traitor would urge upon the husband his right to be late or early, furious or gentle, at home or abroad, just as he pleased, without reference to any one but himself; and would insinuate, that his wife's pale cheeks and wasted figure were caused, not by anxiety and care, but by her own willfulness and temper.

In this way passed the first year of their union; and when, at its close, I was born—a cross and troublesome infant—my parents had thwarted and vexed each other until little of the wild love which had led them to marry remained. Still, an occurrence which took place a few weeks before my appearance in this weary world, will show that, although their affection was diminished, it was not totally destroyed, and that Alice Sackville was not as indifferent toward her husband as she would fain have had him believe.

The part of Ireland in which my father's regiment was then stationed being in a very unsettled state, the troops had been sent there mainly to preserve the peace. But one duty which fell to their lot, was most odious; and of such a nature as to make almost every officer anxious to avoid it. This was searching for and seizing whisky stills: and called in derision "still-hunting." To men who had distinguished themselves both in India and the Peninsula—who bore Seringapatam and Vittoria upon their colors—it was a service which most felt to be a degradation; and nothing but high military discipline, the officers' sense of duty, and the men's habits of subordination, prevented loud remonstrance. Of all the regiments only one officer (a man who had long joined it, and was known to be of low

and quarrelsome disposition), found pleasure in these midnight marches and inglorious detections of contraband stills. Between this man and my father there was a kind of civil hatred: the one despised, the other envied his companion; and, although they were not at open war, their mutual aversion was apparent to every one.

Once or twice Captain Sackville had spoken contemptuously of the readiness with which the new man accepted "active service," and suggested whether a still would not now be a fit addition to the trophies and honors blazoned on the colors of the regiment. One of those busybodies who are always ready to make mischief, repeated my father's sarcasm to the object of it, and before many hours had elapsed from the time of its utterance, a challenge was given and accepted; the meeting being arranged to take place the next morning, upon a wild moor five miles from the barracks. During the afternoon which followed this arrangement, the suspicions of my mother's English maid were aroused by the hints and mysterious looks of her lover; who, being Captain Sackville's servant, had his master's pistols in charge. These surmises she conveyed to her mistress, whose fears, thus excited, were but too painfully confirmed by my father's manner when he came to her room to take leave of her, before starting, as he said, upon a "still-hunting" expedition, which would detain him until the next morning.

My mother fixed her eyes upon her husband as he spoke, and holding the hand which he had extended in farewell, said,

"Are you really going up the mountains, Gerald? Are you sure?"

"Of course, of course," he replied, with a short, nervous laugh: "what makes you ask such a question? Don't I often go upon these glorious errands?"

"Yes, but I have a strange fancy that you are not going on such service to-night."

"Why, what Banshee has been wailing at the window to frighten you, Alice? You look as if you saw one, now: but, don't you know, they never appear until night; so don't be silly, but say good-by and wish me success." And as he spoke he snatched up his cap.

My mother's heart stood still, as the thought that she might never again see him alive rushed across her mind. The ardor of their first passionate love seemed all at once to return; and with an impulsive cry of grief, she sprang from her seat, and threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Why, Alice! what is the matter? Are you ill?" said he, as she clung hysterically to him.

"No no: but you, Gerald! you! where are you going?" she sobbed out.

"Where I told you, silly one. Where else do you think I am going? Come, lie down, and I'll send Marcy to you, and she shall read you to sleep."

"Oh, Gerald! do tell me the truth."

"But you will not believe me, you little infidel! You are nervous and tired, and have got the blue-devils, I'm afraid, from sitting alone. George shall go across and ask Mrs. Martin to come and talk scandal to you—so good-by, and *mind you are better to-morrow.*"

"*And thus they parted: the man thinking that he had succeeded in his deception; and the*

woman as thoroughly convinced that he was trying to mislead her, as if she had read his secret purpose. How often it happens that the very people whom we think we have most craftily deceived, are the most alive to our falsehood: we imagine that we have blinded them, and all the while they are reading us as if the heart were a book.

It required very little ingenuity on the part of Marcy to discover that no still-hunting expedition was in preparation, and that Major Martin and her master were closeted together at the major's quarters, for some very different purpose. Lieutenant Tregear and Mr. Nash had been seen to go into the subalterns' rooms, and from the whole aspect of affairs, it was evident that something unusual was about to happen. Nothing certain, however, could the girl discover, until late in the evening; when, partly by threats, and partly by coaxing, she succeeded in extorting from the fascinated George a confession of all he knew.

It had so happened that, soon after my mother's first arrival in Ireland, her maid had been ill, and that during her absence a young girl, the daughter of the only decent inn-keeper in the village, had been engaged to attend upon the bride. Mrs. Sackville and Honor had been mutually pleased with each other; and, after her short service was over, many were the chickens of her own rearing and pats of butter of her own churning, brought by the warm-hearted Irish maid to the "English lady." And now, in her grief and fear, with no one at hand to aid in carrying out the wild scheme she had formed, my mother thought of Honor, whom she sent for at once, and took into her confidence. The assistance and secrecy required of Honor were promised with that heartiness, with which—be their faults what they may—the children of Erin always respond to the need of a friend. Honor undertook to find out where the duel was to be fought, and to bring a car, driven by her own "bachelor," to a certain spot on the road, where Mrs. Sackville was to meet it, and he taken as nearly as possible to the ground, in order that she might be at hand in case the meeting terminated fatally; and the miserable wife was as firmly assured that the girl's promise would be performed as if it were already done.

CHAPTER II.

OFTEN have I heard my mother describe the wretchedness of that night. It was in the middle of October, which month had, contrary to custom, come in cold, gusty, and wet. The rain fell in torrents, and the clouds were driven across the face of the heavens as if angry spirits were at war, and they fled in terror before them. Every now and then the moon gleamed out with her white, round, passionless face, and cast a sickly glare upon the pools of water in the street, and the glass of the opposite windows. The measured tread of the sentry, and the challenge of the officer of the guard, were the only sounds, except the plashing rain, that broke the stillness; and these appeared to add to, rather than diminish the sense of loneliness. Honor had sent Mrs. Sackville word that at three o'clock she would

be waiting with a ear under the plantation, to the left of the chapel.

Up and down her room my mother paced all night, only stopping to look at her watch by the dim fire-light—for she dared not have candles, lest their appearance at so unusual an hour should arouse suspicion in the minds of any one who might be passing.

At length the clock in the Barrack-square struck the last quarter past two, and, wrapped in a large gray cloak, and trembling from head to foot, my mother stole into the street, and walked hurriedly toward the plantation. Very few words were spoken when she reached it, for Honor saw that Mrs. Sackville was in no mood for talking; so, having for the last time whispered directions to her lover, she obeyed my mother's gesture, and running quickly down the hill, soon disappeared. After a dark and jolting ride of more than an hour, Mike took up his position under shelter of a rock, close to the spot fixed upon by the combatants. There the agitated wife awaited in painful suspense the issue; having nothing wherewith to beguile the tedious hours which must elapse before daybreak, but her hopes and fears, and the prayers which she from time to time offered up for her husband's safety.

At last the morning dawned, and as it broke drearily over the wild and lonely landscape, a chaise driven at full gallop appeared upon the moor. It had scarcely stopped when another arrived, and the trembling wife was near enough to hear her husband speaking in cheerful tones to Major Martin. There was a long low range of rocks, which lay about three hundred yards to the right of the spot where Captain Sackville was placed, and under cover of their shadow my mother crept along in the misty light, and stood as near her husband as she dared.

It was her determination, that if the lives of both combatants were spared she would return home, and never betray her knowledge of the meeting; but that if Gerald fell, or killed his antagonist, she would instantly go forward, and either succor her husband, or accompany him abroad. Brief were the greetings exchanged by the party; the seconds made a formal, but of course ineffectual attempt, to bring about a reconciliation between their principals; they then examined the pistols, placed their men, and went through all the rest of the hateful business necessary for the proper perpetration of honorable murder. Strange influence of custom! Of all the men who took part in the arrangements, not one but would have turned away disgusted from witnessing the necessary proceedings of a slaughter-house; and yet they were met at an unreasonable hour, under cover of twilight and secrecy, to aid a project which had for its fulfillment the temporal, perhaps eternal death of one, if not two fellow-men, whom each one there called friend.

My mother trembled and clung to the rock in breathless alarm and anxiety, and long as she thought the time spent in these fearful preparations, yet she would not have shortened it by a word: but when Major Martin, who had been occupied at a little distance from his friend, *walked quietly over the ground toward him, the horror-struck wife could scarcely repress a scream*

She had so placed herself that she was opposite to her husband, and as she gazed upon his face, and marked its perfect calmness, the utter absence of uneasiness or dread, the quiet, manly courage with which he stood, waiting, as it seemed, for death, she could hardly refrain from rushing forward; and she felt as if she could die with him. All her old love came back, and filled her heart with such a tumult of alarm and fondness, that its wild beating was well-nigh stilled forever.

At this time my mother was far from being a religious character: she had been too fashionably educated, too much idolized and flattered, to have learned many of the deep truths of Christianity; it is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that the only feelings now present to her mind were a woman's admiration of bravery, and a wife's dread of her possible loss. To her fancy there was something heroic in her husband's position and attitude; something sublime in his dauntless and soldierlike serenity. Nothing was exaggerated or done for display; all was the natural effect of a brave heart—and high health: for more than heroes would like to think, does their unflinching courage depend upon their temperance. No fear of an eternal future, no thought of the outraged law of an Almighty Creator visited my father's conscience to make him craven. He was only doing what his father, and his father's father, had done before him; and what, for not doing, a young man in his own regiment had been sent to Coventry by his brother officers, and, finally, hunted out of the army. It was then a matter of course, almost of duty, in a soldier. God's laws, the God of peace and love, are the very last thought of by the duelist. My father was no worse, and, in many things, much better than his fellows; but until men learn to know that the Eternal law, "thou shalt do no murder," is as binding upon a gentleman as upon a peasant, and that in the eyes of the Everlasting, there is no distinction between the murderer whose life is forfeited to the outraged laws of man, and the duelist who goes out in cold blood to take the life of one who has been, perhaps, his dearest friend, offering for excuse the hazard of his own—Christianity, as our Lord left it to us, can have no place in their hearts. We may have brave and dauntless soldiers in our service, but Christian gentlemen we *can not* have.

This same sad perversion of feelings—this confusion of right and wrong—was shared by my poor mother; else how could she have refrained from springing forward and, by her presence, putting an end to the scene upon which she looked? Some may be tempted to say, that she was cold-hearted or unwomanly, thus to have stood, and yet not have interfered! "I could not have done so! I could not have seen my husband killed before my face, or taking another man's life," one may exclaim. Another may remark, "I wonder why she went at all: she could not have loved him, and yet have borne to stand by and see him in danger of being murdered; that is impossible." No, it is not impossible, for it is true. Mrs. Sackville was the sister of a man who had been shot in a duel, and buried with military honors; whose name was cherished as that of a hero, while his antagonist had been dismissed the service. She was the wife of a soldier, and well knew that, if urged by her

innate fears and wifely love, she rushed forward and stayed the duel, her husband would be the object of men's derision: that they would say he had given her a hint of what was going on, and anticipated her interference. She knew that, with his hot and fiery temper, he would imagine such things, even if they were never said; and that this one meeting so interrupted, would thus lead to others. She had experienced his distaste for all displays of affection made by wives, and well knew that, so sensitive was his pride, he would rather lose ten lives than be quizzed as the object of his wife's dotting love. Knowing all this, therefore, my mother stood in silent tremor by the rocks, and when all was ready, clasped her hands so tightly, in the agony of apprehension, that her finger-nails turned livid with the pressure. Her eyes were riveted upon her husband, as if her gaze could protect him; but, at the sudden flash and report of his pistol, her courage failed her, and she fainted.

When she recovered, she found herself at home, and the first sound which met her ear was her husband's gay laugh under her window. Honor and Marcy were beside her, chafing her hands and weeping; for her insensibility had lasted so long that they began to be alarmed, and to think that they were acting imprudently in concealing the state of his wife from Captain Sackville; but just as they had decided upon sending for him, her eyes unclosed, and consciousness was restored.

In reply to my mother's looks of inquiry, she was told that Honor, fearing lest her strength should fail in the hour of need, had followed the car, and was actually present during the whole of that agonizing night-watch. She had witnessed the duel, and had seen that Lieutenant Tregear's ball had shot away his antagonist's epaulette, while Captain Sackville had fired in the air; she had also heard the reconciliation that followed. On seeing Mrs. Sackville fall, she waited until the gentlemen had re-entered their carriages and driven off, and then, with Mike's assistance, had carried my mother to the car, and by taking a short road, had reached home a few minutes before the late combatants had entered the town.

This explanation was scarcely over, when my father rapped at the door; for, although it was still very early, he fancied that he heard his wife's voice, and remembering her anxiety of the night before, was come to relieve it in person.

My mother, attired in a long frilled white dressing-gown, was lying on the bed, to which the girls had carried her when she was first brought in; while her rich fair ringlets, straightened by the dank night-air, and hanging loosely about her pale face, mingled with the half unplaited tresses behind, and gave her a ghastly appearance. Round her eyelids was a deep circle of black, and her eyes wandered as if she was not yet wholly conscious; but hearing her husband's voice, she sprang from the bed, and, answering him quickly, advanced with a tottering, feeble step to meet him. As he entered, she crossed the room, and, to his terror and amazement, caught at a small table to steady her trembling steps, and before he could inquire what was the cause of her strange appearance and evident suffering, she reeled and fell; a scent-bottle breaking in the fall, a portion of the glass cut a

small vein in her head, and in a moment she lay bleeding at his feet.

This accident, alarming, as it seemed, was in effect a most fortunate occurrence; for the excitement of the past night had brought on fever, which was thus timely subdued by the loss of blood.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGE as it may appear, this incident annoyed my father greatly; and although he could not help being touched by his wife's devotion, still the idea that he had been watched, and was exposed to jesting remarks upon her romantic affection, irritated him continually. My mother's quick perception soon discovered this, and the reaction in her mind was terrible. She had suffered intensely; she felt that she had controlled her own feelings from tenderness to his; and, as proud people always do, she dwelt upon his ingratitude, until her own faults were forgotten, and she fancied herself the most ill-used and miserable wife in existence. Alas! how many people make their own sorrows by exaggerating their wrongs, and wholly overlooking their own sins, both of omission and commission.

It was in the midst of all this bitterness that I was born; and certainly there was nothing in my appearance or disposition to conciliate; for I was an ugly child, with a furious temper, and even then showed a true feminine love of my own way.

Poor old Cicely, my Irish nurse, was a faithful believer in all fairy legends, and had taken no little trouble to procure a properly-shaped horse-shoe to fix upon my cradle the moment I was deposited in it, to preserve me from the power of evil spirits. But this was not all; not only was I to be protected from evil powers, it was also necessary to propitiate the good, and accordingly, my mother having sunk to sleep at the fortunate hour upon the right day, I was carried by Cicely to a place where four roads met, there to make my offering of green ribbon to "the good people." This was done very successfully, and greatly to my nurse's satisfaction; especially as a slight breeze carried the propitiatory offering exactly in the centre of a fairy ring, which adorned the little green patch between the roads: and this, to a proficient in fairy lore, was known to signify that the gift was accepted.

The unhappy and the unfortunate are proverbially superstitious above their fellows, and, in my days of sorrow, I have often caught myself wondering where my fairy patrons were, who had at my birth appeared so propitious; and often, too, when some strange good chance, equally unlooked for and welcome, has come suddenly to my relief, I have thought to myself, with more earnestness than I should have liked to confess, "Ah, my fairies have not forgotten me." I do not defend this folly, nor wish to excuse it; but I do say, that there are few hearts among us in which, if they were honestly searched, some nook would not be found, where a half-acknowledged superstition, dearer to us than we think, nestles and thrives.

Partly because I was the child of a man they liked, and partly because—having been born on their own soil, and having, thanks to Cicely, complied with a darling prejudice—I seemed to belong to them, I was a cherished favorite among the people, who watched me in my walks and rides as if I were a young princess; and by the time I attained my sixth year I had become duly impressed with my own importance, having been told hundreds of times a week, that I was “a rare lady, one of the old sort. God bless ‘em!” which I thought a very sufficient reason for giving way to every impulse of passion and pride.

About this period my mother took my sister and myself to England on a visit to her parents, whom she had not seen since her marriage; and never shall I forget my astonishment and disapprobation when we reached Ingerdyne (which was the name of my grandfather’s place). I don’t know what I expected, nor with what ideas Cicely had filled my head; but the quiet, stately house, and somewhat grave and formal inhabitants, filled me with anger and disappointment. Later in life I learned to love the dear old place well; but then, fresh from the flattering attentions of the wild and enthusiastic Irish people, and the gayety and bustle of a home enlivened by uniforms, and not remarkable for the regularity of its management, the quiet manners and dignified visitors, the peaceful walks, and steady habits of tidiness and subordination, which prevailed at Ingerdyne, could not fail to be disagreeable to me.

My grandfather was one of the old school of English country gentlemen, and although small in stature was stately in manner: nobody could take a liberty with him; one would as soon have thought of proposing a waltz with Sphinx as to put a jest upon him. He was a man whose simple affirmation, even to a stranger, would have been sufficient guarantee of his good faith; for there was something in his open brow and clear eye, and even in the tone of his voice, that bespoke the integrity of a gentleman. He never made a bargain; gambling and wagers of every sort were utterly distasteful to him; he never could understand how it was possible for a gentleman to practice either. He was proud as a Spaniard of his ancient family and honorable birth, for he had an old-world scorn of traffic in all its ramifications; and, though he never boasted (he was far too high-bred for that), yet he loved to think that no tradesman, wholesale or retail, could trace the most distant cousinship to him; but with all his reserve and dignity he was generous, courteous, and kind; ready to listen to a tale of distress, and liberal to bestow relief; open-hearted and chivalrous.

My grandmother was a fit wife for her husband, gentle and gracious, simple and tender. Her want of natural energy was never discovered, because her habit of reliance and dependence upon my grandfather was so great, that no one suspected her retiring manners arose from any thing but her having deference to him in all things. Not that he was a tyrant, or she a slave, but because she really believed that he exceeded all other human beings in wisdom and goodness. What she would have done had it pleased God she should become a widow, I can not imagine, for long habit seemed to have

rendered her incapable of acting upon her own opinion in any matter of importance: but she was mercifully spared the trial, for she died a few months before her husband.

The servants at Ingerdyne were all old dependents; many of them had lived in the family from childhood, being sons and daughters of former domestics, and they all welcomed my mother with delight. She had been a great favorite with them, and they were prepared to love her children now, as much as they had formerly done herself. But this was not so easy a matter, for I was a difficult little person for these quiet, well-ordered English people to manage, and they were in a constant state of perplexity between their love for the mother, and their annoyance at the child. Yet my delinquencies seldom went further than trampling over the flower-beds, leaving the park gates open, and thus setting free the horses that were grazing within its boundaries, upsetting the flower-pots in the greenhouse, or frightening whole families of little chickens by running at full speed across the poultry-yard where their mothers were cooped up. I was not mischievous—unless mischief is a more innocent kind of thing than it is usually described; for I had no love of wanton destruction for its own sake. I was even vexed with myself when I saw the flowers crushed into the mould by the pressure of my wayward little feet; and if I had stopped to listen, I should have been sorry to hear the shrill chirping of the terrified chickens as they ran fluttering in dismay to the shelter of the hen-coops, in bodily fear of the heedless invader. No! I certainly was not mischievous; I was simply thoughtless and uncontrolled. The only one of my freaks which really afforded me *delight*, was the escape of the wild young horses through some gate which I had left open, and the alarm of the slow and astonished servants. I loved to see the beautiful animals, after a furious gallop, stop altogether, standing with heads erect and distended nostrils, until their captors with coaxing call approached within a few yards and put out caressing and deceitful hands; when, as if moved by one general impulse, the horses would all wheel about at once, and race round and round the fields till their frolic was over, and they swept in through the gate to their prison again.

In all my peregrinations I was accompanied by an English nurse, chosen for me by my grandmother before I arrived, for her careful and sedate propriety; but, with all her anxiety and real desire to do her duty, it was impossible for her to restrain the eagerness and ardor of my disposition: I was as far beyond her comprehension as she was beyond mine. I have often wondered how it was that my grandfather, with his love of order and regularity, brooked my wayward recklessness and irregular habits; but I suppose he consoled himself with the feeling, which he one day put into words, in reply to a lady who expressed a fear that I should grow up “vulgar.”

“No, madam,” he said, with his proud little smile, “Florence has not one drop of plebeian blood in her veins; and, wild as she may be, she can never be vulgar.”

I believe he was right, for of all the bad qualities attributed to me by different people at different

times, no one ever imputed to me any thing which would have justified that lady's fear.

Proud though I was, and so far like himself, my grandfather never loved me; for I was, as people say, the image of my father, and at times, when strongly excited, I spoke with the accent of his country. Neither with my mother was I ever a favorite: neglect and unkindness, aggravated, perhaps, by her own unconciliating manners, had long before this separated her heart entirely from her husband; and I was like him in so many ways and features, that people were never surprised to find I was less loved than my fair and gentle little sister. / I was chidden for faults of which I had never been warned; motives and thoughts were attributed to me which had never entered my imagination; mischief and destruction were laid to my charge, which I had never committed; and continual allusions were made to my wild Irish voice and manner. For awhile all this distressed me cruelly, for I had a warm, fond heart, and generous disposition, and I sought eagerly to exonerate or justify myself. But when I found that justice—that cold, stern quality—was merely done me, and that, if I had been wrongfully accused, it was only the principle of justice that was considered to have been outraged, not my feelings, I ceased to excuse my faults or plead with tears for pardon, and became that most wretched thing, a child with a woman's will.

To this early mistake in my education how much of the evil of my after life is owing! What a desperate enemy people arm against themselves when they are unjust! Once let the offender feel that he is treated with injustice, and all the motive to repentance is gone. A man may have many and great faults, he may be giving way to a sin ten times greater than the particular one of which he is accused; but only let him suffer blame and punishment for one of which he knows himself to be innocent, and all his real guilt will be forgotten in angry indignation at the injustice. The sinner, then, in his own opinion, becomes the martyr; and all reformation is hopeless. How is it that people will not see this, and especially in children? There is no greater mistake, than to suspect and accuse a child of faults and motives of which you have not full proof; if you make a wrong guess, you have lost your position almost irrevocably; and if you act upon it, you have set up in the child's heart a memory of outrage forever.

When we had been at Ingerdyne a few months, my father came there to visit us, and brought with him a young brother officer, who was the son of an old friend of my grandfather's. Why he did so, I can not imagine; unless it was to provide, by the society of this friend, against the ennui of a country residence: and if this were his object, it was certainly fully attained, for the two friends were inseparable. One of the few amusements in which my grandfather indulged was billiards, and his house was therefore provided with a splendid room and table dedicated to the game. In this room my father and Captain Launceston spent many hours; and, as might be expected, large sums were lost by each to the other; although, Captain Launceston being the best player, his companion was most frequently the loser.

Ingerdyne being only a few miles from New-

market, it had been the custom of my grandfather and his family, for generations past, to attend the meetings regularly; and some years before, upon his appointment as high sheriff, the equipage and horses bearing his arms and livery had made so brilliant an appearance as to be even yet talked of in the county. Things were, however, altered now; for the large sums bestowed upon his children had sadly impaired my grandfather's means, and among other retrenchments the races had been given up. Still, for the gratification of my mother, who had a womanish pride in showing her husband the style in which English country gentlemen lived, he determined to visit Newmarket once more in the old style.

I remember the day well; it was a glorious morning in autumn, the leaves had begun to change, and all the wealth of nature seemed scattered upon the lawns, and hung on every golden-hued tree. The carriages came round to the hall-door; and with their bright panels, and the silver ornaments on the trappings of the horses, the rich green liveries, spotless buckskins and velvet caps of the postillions, they promised to form a brilliant addition to the scene at Newmarket.

For the first time, I felt proud of the neatness and style of my mother's English home, and its belongings; and, as I stood at the nursery-window and watched the carriages sweeping along below, I felt more respect for my grandfather's prejudices, than I had ever done before. The effect of this impression was, that I turned round, picked up the books and toys I had scattered all over the room, tidied the table, and went to my maid to request that my hair might be brushed, and my frock changed. How slight a thing may leave a lasting memory! a glance, a sound, has often awakened thoughts and resolutions which have endured for life; and we can frequently trace back our wisest determination to some sudden conviction wrought by a seeming trifle. So it was that day with me. I had seen the order and elegance of the establishment at Ingerdyne, the propriety of the domestics, and the unsullied neatness of all the appliances, every hour since I arrived; and at first they had only struck me as formal and disagreeable, the result of a perpetual fidgeting which was the enemy of all gayety and freedom. Now all was altered, and I looked with a strange respect upon the regulations which had resulted in the brilliant cortège I had been gazing upon. From that day there was a change in my habits; and, although I was far from being as sedate as other well-behaved children, I was no longer a tameless romp: indeed, considering what I had been, the change left me a rather discreet little person.

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the absence of the party at Newmarket, I was fated to become acquainted with sundry other members of the family, of whom I had heard but vaguely. My mother had an only brother, an officer in a hussar regiment, serving in the Peninsula. He had for some time been stationed at Gibraltar, where he met at a ball a young Spanish beauty from Madrid, with the

large black eyes and coquettish manners for which her countrywomen are famed. He was fascinated by her charms, and soon procured an introduction; but, as he could not speak a word of Spanish, and she was equally ignorant of English, one would not have thought the acquaintance was likely to be either very long or interesting; but there is no accounting for the freaks of Cupid, especially when he lurks amid the olive groves of Spain. A few days after the ball, to the despair of the governor's niece, the horror of the colonel's two daughters, and the disgust of sundry other damsels, who had entertained hopes of the eligible major and his father's property, it was announced by the chaplain at Government-house, that, with the aid of an interpreter, he had the day before married Donna Josephina Leoline da Silva to Major Vere. Great was the consternation caused by this intelligence. The governor who was godfather to the bridegroom, and upon whose staff the offender had long been placed, was in dismay: he sent immediately for the culprits and the clergyman, threatened arrest and all sorts of impossibilities, stormed most furiously, and prophesied manifold evils which were to arise from this ill-considered union; but, after all, ended in a promise that he would receive the delinquents at Government-house, and intercede for them with Mr. Vere.

Very few weeks elapsed before the major and his bride mutually repented their marriage. Her temper was terrific; she was jealous and desperate to a degree of which English people have no idea, and, having never learned to regulate or control it, the life of those around her was rendered any thing but agreeable. She had taken the most violent hatred to Miss Danvers, the governor's niece, whom she suspected of an attachment to her husband, and in whose most commonplace civilities she discovered sinister intentions, of which neither her husband nor the lady ever dreamed; the consequence of this was a very unpleasant coolness between the families, which ended in the major being compelled to resign his staff-appointment, and change his quarters to a miserable little inland town.

This circumstance, which was necessarily reported to my grandfather, did not assist in propitiating him toward his Spanish daughter-in-law; and nothing but the dangerous illness of his wife—who, believing herself dying, besought his pardon for her darling and only son—would ever have reconciled him to Major and Mrs. Vere. As it was, he dispatched a letter of severe reproof to his son; in which, after predicting the miseries certain to accrue from this act of folly, he concluded with a cold message of forgiveness to his daughter-in-law, and a formal invitation to Ingerdyne.

This occurred about five years before my mother's marriage; and there had not appeared any prospect of a visit from my uncle, aunt, or cousins—of whom there were four—until the day of the excursion to Newmarket, when they descended upon us in great force.

I was sitting in the hall, reading "Robinson Crusoe," and as I read pulling out unconsciously the hairs from the tail of a great rocking-horse against which I leaned, when I heard the sound of wheels along the gravel sweep. In a moment after, the hall was darkened suddenly, and looking up to ascertain the cause, I saw drawn up

before the door, and intercepting the light, a traveling carriage, packed inside and out to a perilous excess. I did not move, for I felt no curiosity about the circumstance, and certainly did not consider it any part of my duty to open the door, but when the post-boy rolled off his horse, and applied his whole force to the bell, I rose and went forward to survey the arrivals. Just as I reached the entrance, the carriage door, over which were crowded heads of all sizes and ages, suddenly burst open, and down came what seemed in the confusion to be a whole nursery of children. Never in my life had I been so astonished. The screams of the children were soft and musical compared to those of their mother, whose vehement gesticulations and shrill voice, invoking the most unintelligible mixture of saints and punishments, were to me perfectly terrific. At first I stood still, gazing panic-struck upon the scene; then turning round I rushed through the house screaming like a little fury, until every creature in it, from the old cook to the fat lap-dog, came to the rescue. In the course of my frantic career I arrived at my grandfather's dressing-room, the open windows of which looked out upon the scene of tumult; and there I stood to see the result.

Every body was now congregated in a group beside the carriage, staring at the party, which consisted of a tall, soldierly man; a little, fat, Moorish-looking woman; a boy about four years older than myself, and very much taller; a wild-looking girl, a little younger; another younger still, and a baby in the arms of a *bonne*.

The two girls and the baby were crying with all their might; but the boy stood with his arms folded, looking amazed, but strange and contemptuous, and as if no one there belonged to him. The lady was exclaiming and gesticulating furiously; threatening with hands and feet, eyes and tongue, the unfortunate post-boy, whom she accused of the most diabolical intentions in not having fastened the door properly; while he, bewildered by her volubility, and stunned by the noise, stared stupidly at her.

The gentleman was trying to pacify and quiet the lady; in which praiseworthy undertaking he was seconded by the French nurse, who chattered to her mistress while she energetically tossed the baby, greatly to the alarm and discomfort of the screaming child. Looking on, in a state of great amazement and impatience, stood Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper, who seemed perfectly at a loss to understand who these awful people could be; and with all her ideas of Ingerdyne propriety up in arms at this outrage upon the peace and quiet of the establishment.

All this time, no one had the slightest idea of who the visitors were, for most of the old servants were either gone with the carriages, or had taken advantage of their master's unusual absence to indulge in a holiday, so that there was no one who recognized "Master William." At last, quite tired out with his useless endeavors to pacify his wife, the gentleman turned to Mrs. Reynolds, and said,

"My father is not at home, I fear."

"Sir?" answered she, doubting the evidence of her own ears.

"My father, Mr. Vere: I am Major Vere."

"Oh, sir; I beg your pardon! I had no idea

—No, sir; Mr. Vere and all the company are gone to Newmarket. I am sure I beg your pardon, sir, for not knowing you; but I was not aware that you were expected. That is Mrs. Vere, with the young ladies and gentlemen, I presume."

"Yes," said the major, shortly; for he detected the displeased surprise of his father's servant in her voice. His foreign wife had evidently made no favorable impression upon the precise Englishwoman; and matters were not improved when Mrs. Vere exclaimed, vehemently,

"Where are the servants? William! William!" addressing her husband imperiously, "has your father no people to receive us properly? Why does nobody come? Is dis de way you English behave? Oh, misery! why did I ever leave my own Spain, where every body is hospitable and good, for this country of savages?" and she darted a look of rage at the miserable post-boy.

"My dear, here are plenty of servants. This is the housekeeper; let her show you into the house, and I will give orders about the luggage."

"No, no; I will stay myself; I will trust nobody here: dey are all shocking. You remember your English servant in Spain, how he cheat you. I have not forgot him. No, no; I will stay."

It would be difficult to describe the various looks of vexation, astonishment, and anger which come over the countenances of Major Vere, Mrs. Reynolds, and the boy, at this speech. There was something in its tone and manner which, more than even the words, conveyed the impression of vulgarity. A Spanish lady might very well be ignorant of English customs, and make a strange medley of the language, using inappropriate and even offensive words, but no lady of any country could have used such intonations and gestures as those which accompanied Mrs. William Vere's speech.

My uncle made no reply; for there is such a thing (and he knew it) as making bad worse by interference, so, turning round, he addressed the housekeeper, asking if there was company in the house.

"Yes, sir. Captain and Mrs. Sackville are here, with their two children; and Captain Launceston, and Mr. and Mrs. Paget, and—"

"Captain and Mrs. Sackville! Do you mean my sister?"

"Yes, sir."

He knitted his brow, and I heard him mutter an oath between his closed teeth. Presently he asked—"How long have they been here?"

"Mrs. Sackville has been on a visit to her father several months, sir; but the captain only arrived a fortnight since."

At the sound of my father's name, which appeared familiar to her, Mrs. Vere started and exclaimed,

"Sackveel! Sackveel! dat your sister, William?"

"Yes," he answered abruptly.

"What she do here? She should be in Ireland. Dis not do at all."

At this moment my boy cousin, whose eyes had been roaming over the house, exclaimed, pointing to me, as I stood at the window above,

"Who's that?"

In an instant every one looked up, and Mrs. Reynolds said, with a smile to me,

"It's your cousin, sir—Miss Florence Sackville. Miss Sackville, more properly, for she is the eldest."

A frown settled upon my uncle's brow as he turned away, and, speaking to his wife in Spanish, walked with her a few steps apart. They evidently entered into a grave consultation.

My cousin, whose manners and appearance were those of a youth of fifteen, instead of a boy of twelve, kissed his hand to me and called out,

"If you are not shut up, cousin Florence, come down directly."

This rather authoritative request had no greater effect upon me than to make me open my eyes as wide as possible, and stare with all the indignation I could muster; at which display of dignity my cousin only laughed, as if amused, calling out,

"Little thing, how you stare! Do you think you are a woman already, and not to be taken such liberties with?"

I never could bear ridicule, and don't know what passionate things I might have said; for I felt my face and neck glowing with a sudden heat, from the angry blood which rushed over them; and I knew by the boy's laugh that he saw and enjoyed it: but my uncle called to him in an angry tone to follow him into the house, and in a minute they had disappeared.

For a short time the whole house seemed to be in confusion; the screams of the children, the banging of doors and rushing up and down stairs, struck me with a sort of angry terror, anger that any one should dare to be so familiar in my grandfather's house (I forgot that he was the father and grandfather of the visitors too), and terror at the noise, which seemed to me horrible.

In about half an hour my maid, who had been seized upon and pressed into the service of the newly-imported nursery, came to me, and, in her usual quiet way, requested me to go with her into the library, where my uncle wished to see me. The library was a large, old room, at one end of which yawned a vast chimney, in which my grandfather was accustomed to burn huge logs of wood upon the hearth. The floor round the fire-place was inlaid with ornamental encaustic tiles, and the fender was formed of stone blocks standing about half a foot high, rounded at the top and fitted into the tiles. This last is a fashion I never saw except at Ingerdyne, until lately that Mr. Pugin has introduced it into several houses built by him; in one of which, the Palace of the Roman Catholic Bishop at Birmingham, these stone fenders are in every room that I have seen. Opposite the fire-place was a noble window, occupying the whole end of the room, except a small space on each side, where stood high, narrow book-cases, nearly concealed by the heavy folds of the curtains. The room was divided by two pillars close to the walls, supporting a pole of carved oak, over which in cold winter nights was drawn a thick curtain, matching those at the window; thus contracting the spacious room into a comfortable snuggerly.

Lounging in one of the great deep arm-chairs, half-screened from the light by these curtains, sat my uncle. He was alone; and as I entered the room he leaned forward upon a small read-

ing table that stood by him, and looked at me. There was a cold, sarcastic smile upon his face: an expression which was quite new to me; for all with whom I had ever associated, as yet, had been open and fearless, and, whatever their bad passions might be, they rather gloried in, than disclaimed or concealed them: pride, anger, and self-confidence never being looked upon by any member of our family as sins or offenses against propriety. I was too young then to analyze the impression which my uncle's smile made upon me, but my instinct told me there was something wrong in it: something cold, false, and wily; and although his features were perfect as to form and regularity, and his tone of voice gracious and condescending, the first impulses of my heart were aversion and distrust. I suppose he read these feelings in my face, for the expression of his own changed, and he said:

"So you are the young lady who wished not to be treated as a child just now: the height deceived me; I expected to see a girl of sixteen at least, and not a baby. Come here, and let me see if you are as high as the table;" and he laughed sardonically.

I was a very tall child of my age, and not a little proud of it; to be treated in this contemptuous way, therefore, was more than I could bear patiently. I felt my color come and go, and my breath quicken as I stood still where I had first entered.

"Don't you know what I say? don't you understand English?" he asked, sharply.

I was silent. Many men would have taken this for shyness, and have given up the task of trying to make me speak; but not so did Major Vere: he knew that I was not frightened—that no babyish coyness kept me silent, but that the instinct of the child had answered to the penetration and worldly knowledge of the man, and that in my eyes he was an object to be shunned. From this day to that of his death, we never changed our opinions of each other; and, without attributing to him any greater sin than an intense hatred, I do believe that he would have rejoiced exceedingly to hear of my death. This may seem an exaggerated feeling to attribute to any man against a child, toward whom aversion would generally be shown by utter indifference; but to a man who goes on his way deceiving, there is something in the calm gaze of a child, and in its fresh and clear perceptions, that harasses and bewilders him.

While my uncle was thus questioning me, the door opened, and my cousin Philip entered, who, coming up to the table, fixed his eyes upon me with a look of puzzled interest. He did not speak for some time, but at last he said in an under tone, and as if unconsciously:

"Poor Flor!"

There was something in the tone so genuine that my heart melted, and the tears I had been repressing crowded into my eyes. Philip saw it, and soon created a diversion in my favor by upsetting a large vase of flowers, the water in which deluged his father's feet, and completely drew off his attention from me.

CHAPTER V.

In a very short time Philip and I were close friends; for in one thing there was a great sim-

ilarity between us, both being proud and self-confident; we were, therefore, able to sympathize with each other in all grievances, real or fancied. But, however amicably we arranged matters, others were not so fortunate. The whole establishment at Ingerdyne was quickly thrown into confusion by our new visitors; the Spanish lady and her French *bonne* keeping us all, from the kitchen to the drawing-room, in a perpetual state of ferment, so that my poor grandfather began, for the first time in his life, to think that the Irish were a most belied and peaceable race. And certainly he found his son-in-law, whom hitherto he had so much disliked, a model of propriety and gentleness when compared with this terrible daughter-in-law. I, too, came in for my share in the benefit accruing from this new state of affairs; being, in comparison with my three youngest cousins, a very pattern of quietness and obedience. This, however, was a state of things too dangerous to the interests of the major and his wife, to be allowed to continue, without an effort on their part to alter it.

My uncle was wary and clever, and, knowing his father's prejudices, was always contriving that my father and I should offend them in some way or other. Upon looking back to this period, I must acknowledge that his management showed considerable talent; for, although there were times when we could not help seeing whose specious words had led us into error, still they had been so craftily spoken, that it was impossible to fix an evil intention upon the speaker.

Between us all, my poor grandfather was in a most wretched state. Distracted by the volubility of Mrs. William Vere's broken English, in which she constantly attacked him for some imaginary wrong inflicted by somebody; appealed to by his son-in-law—quietly, certainly, but sometimes upon very irritating occasions; annoyed by the crying and refractory children, who invaded all parts of the hitherto peaceable house and grounds; and wearied by the perpetual discord, he looked harassed and care-worn enough to attract even my attention. One day, after another of the recriminatory and bitter "explanations" between my father and my uncle, which had been as usual referred to my grandfather, and in which, as usual, Major Vere had managed to appear the aggrieved conciliator, Philip said to me:

"Flor, there is something wrong going on, I'm sure. My father is deceiving Mr. Vere."

I looked at him, not in doubt or astonishment, but in acquiescence; for my dislike to my uncle had increased until it had become nearly hatred, and I simply answered:

"Yes."

"I know it, Flor, and I'll tell you why it is; for I can trust you, though you are girl, and I hate all these cunning underhand ways."

I sat down upon the grass where we were walking, and prepared to listen.

"You know, Flor, that I never lived at home till a few months ago. My father's godfather, old Sir Hugh Danvers, was mine, too, and took me as soon as I was born. While I was with him, I was as happy as the day was long—I wish I was there now," and the boy heaved a sigh. "Well, all that time, I scarcely ever saw my mother, for we were at Government-house and she was going about from place to place

but my father often came, and I heard the officers and Sir Hugh say, every time he arrived, how he was changed for the worse, and that he had become as cunning as his Spanish wife. I did not think much of this then, because I never thought I should leave Sir Hugh, and I did not much care for people I was not likely ever to live with."

I remember when Philip said this, that a kind of odd sensation came over me, as if it was wrong; but as I could not have defined it, nor pointed out where the error lay, I remained silent. He continued:

"Well, three months before we came here, I was finishing my drill lesson, when Sir Hugh sent for me. I found him in his study reading a letter, and looking very unhappy. 'Phil,' he said, 'you are about to leave me: your father is going to England on leave, and has sent for you.' I was frightened, and cried, 'No, no; I can't go—don't let me go.' 'I can not help it, Phil,' he said; 'your father has a right to you, and I have none: you *must* go.' Oh, how I cried, Flor. I don't think you or any body else ever saw me cry before or since, but I cried then dreadfully, and Sir Hugh walked about the room almost as miserably as I was. At last he came and sat down again by me, and said, 'Be a man, Phil. I am glad to see you love me so much; but you must not cry like a girl. Cheer up, and listen to me: you are my godson, and I love you better than any body on earth, except my niece; so, some day, if I live, you shall come back to me. But mind, Phil, it must be as you are. I will have no unning, artful, ungentlemanly tricks: no saying one thing and meaning another; no making a thing look like truth that is not truth. Keep an honest soldier's heart, brave and true. You will, I fear, see a great deal which I hope you will shun; but I must not tell you what. If you are the proud-hearted boy I think you, you will scorn deceit and hate a lie; and if you are not, I shall find it out when you come back, and with me then you *shall* not stay. Your grandfather is my oldest friend, and his family one of the most ancient in England; take care that you bring no disgrace upon it. You are the eldest son of his eldest son, and the honor of the whole race is in your keeping; you have no right to blench it by a single unworthy deed or thought. That which is given to you entire, must be returned unblemished. And now I must speak to you about the great enemy of mankind—money. It is the root of all evil; and the undue love and striving for it, leads men into greater infamy than any other invention of the arch-fiend. But with you this need never be a temptation. Be economical, at the same time that you are liberal, and gentlemanly in your pursuits and habits; and send to me freely whenever you want money. I shall never think you require too much, if you obey these cautions. I speak to you as I would to a young man, Phil, because, though you are but a child in years, you have all those years lived among men, and ought to have more than a child's intelligence; therefore as I *treat* you, so I *expect* you to behave. Here is a pocket-book, you will find in it more money than you have ever had before. I shall be glad if you send me an account of how you spend it; but do as you please: I do not insist upon it, only I should like it. Now go and tell Harris

to pack up your clothes, for you must go to-morrow; and when he has done so bid him come to me.' Well, that horrible to-morrow came, and I went: but, Flor., if I thought I should never go back to Sir Hugh, but live in this way all my life, I should either do some dreadful thing to somebody else, or kill myself—I know I should," and the boy sprang up and leaned against the acacia-tree which spread its canopy above us, and breathed hard, as if wrestling with himself.

I was too frightened to speak, for such calm, deep passion I had never seen before, and I could do nothing but wonder. At last, after several minutes' silence, he continued:

"In a few days I got home. All the way I had been wondering what it would be like, but when I saw it!—Flor., it's bad enough here, with all this quarreling and plotting, but it is heaven compared with our home abroad. It was a great house full of dirty little rooms half-furnished. Every thing was soiled, torn or broken; nothing was clean, or in its place; our meals were as untidy and irregular as if we had been on a march, and nobody ever seemed to know whose place it was to do even the commonest things. No servant that was good for any thing ever staid, because the house was like a Babel. One day we were half-famished, for some whim of my mother's, and the next, there was waste enough to have kept the village. Sometimes my mother would storm at my father until he went out of the house in a rage; and a few hours after she would be petting and fondling him as if he were a baby. We were never at peace; always either in fire or frost. But all this would have been bearable, if it had not been for the false things my mother used to say of Sir Hugh, and the way in which she spoke of coming here. Something—I can't tell what—that my father was told at the reading-rooms, decided him to come to England; and, I am sure, from what I have heard lately, that something wrong is going on, and my grandfather is being deceived. I know that your family were not expected to be found here, and I think that has something to do with the plan that is forming now, and which I do believe is to get my grandfather to leave all his property to us. It is to further this scheme that your father is so often misled. I am sure of it; and it makes me miserable. This must be what Sir Hugh meant when he told me I should see things done that he hoped I would avoid: and I will avoid them; for somehow or other, I will find out the plot and defeat it, if I can. People think I am a child, but Sir Hugh was right; living with men, makes me a man, and I never feel like a child, except when I am with you, Flor. And if it were not for you I would not stay a week longer: I would write to Sir Hugh, and tell him what I think, and he would send for me, I know; but I like you, Flor., and I will not go if I can help it."

This conversation is as strongly impressed upon my memory, as if it had only taken place yesterday; and if I were there, I could point out the very spot, and the trees and shrubs upon which my eyes often turned while these words were spoken by Philip. Those objects have been connected in my thoughts with the words ever since, and when I see them, I recollect every syllable, look, and tone; no wonder, then, that I can repeat them perfectly.

CHAPTER VI.

MAJOR and Mrs. Vere had been at Ingerdyne about three months, when my grandmother's birthday occurred. It was always kept as a festival, and this time there was to be a ball, for the sake of the young people, and all the family friends were bidden to it. Every nook was turned into a dormitory, and beds were contrived in the most extraordinary places. Every thing that was very uncomfortable, and out of the way, was said "to do very well for bachelors," all tolerable contrivances being appropriated to the ladies. For some days previous, the whole house was in commotion; for it was so long since any preparations of the kind had been made at Ingerdyne, that the old servants had almost forgotten how to set about them, and required continual assistance and directions. The billiard-room was to be appropriated for dancing, and the table under it was to be fixed in the library for the gentlemen's amusement next day, in case any of them remained. The green-houses, both at home and at Aston, the seat of our nearest neighbor, were emptied of their beauties to adorn the hall and staircase; which, when decked for the fête and lighted with colored lamps, looked like a fairy garden.

Mrs. William Vere was in ecstasies, and ran about proclaiming her satisfaction to every body; for no one could make her understand that these preparations were not intended as a welcome to the heir and herself, but were a compliment of love from Mr. Vere to his wife. My father laughed at her absurdity, but my mother was very indignant, and showed her contempt for the Spanish lady in every way she could; happily for our peace, however, the latter was so fully impressed with the idea of her own importance and dignity, that she never perceived these covert insults, but prepared with the greatest self-complacency to play her part as the observed of all observers.

When the evening came, at my grandmother's express desire, Philip, Josephine, and I, stood beside her when she received her guests. Her simple dignity impressed us all, and we were as quiet as statues; never speaking unless addressed. Philip's proud eye flashed with pleasure while he listened to the names of the visitors as they were announced, and recognized among the most distinguished many of whom he had read and heard. Even his mother's exaggerated manner was subdued by the tone of those around her; and, to the evident relief of her husband, she became silent and observant.

The group which most strongly attracted her attention, consisted of an elderly gentleman and lady, with two younger ones, the eldest of whom, though certainly thirty years of age, was by far the most attractive person in the room. She was tall, and slight, with fair complexion, and auburn hair, which, confined with a wide circle of pearls, fell in ringlets over her shoulders. Her dress was of deep emerald velvet, without trimming or ornament, so that her beautiful figure owed nothing of its grace or elegance to the aid of her milliner. Major Vere approached to pay his compliments to her with the ease and eagerness of one meeting an old friend, and Mrs. William Vere observed with alarm that the lady, previously so pale, suddenly crimsoned, and after

a short conversation took his arm and walked with him to join a country dance which was then forming.

"Who is dat? who is dat?" she eagerly asked of my grandmother, fixing her eyes upon the lady.

"Do you mean the lady in green velvet, dancing with William? That is Miss Arthur."

"Does she know him long?"

"Oh, yes, they were children together: Marion is not much younger than he is, and at one time, before he went abroad, it seemed probable that it would have been a match."

My grandmother spoke without thought of mischief, for she had not the most remote idea of her daughter-in-law's jealousy; and even had she been aware of it, she would have considered it, in this instance, too ridiculous to guard against. Not so thought Mrs. William; for her eyes flashed as she watched the offending pair mingling in the dance, and heard Miss Arthur's silvery laugh in reply to her partner's lively remarks.

When the dance was over, the wife observed her husband's companion say something to him in a low tone, which caused him to look round and follow with his eyes the direction of hers. Then a few more words appeared to pass, and, with Miss Arthur leaning on his arm, Major Vere crossed the room to introduce her to his wife.

Nothing could exceed the mortified astonishment of both, at the reception they met with from Mrs. William Vere; her black eyes literally blazed with fury, and although she controlled her tongue, fearful of her mother-in-law's observation, yet her choked voice and agitated frame too plainly showed that something was wrong—what it could be, or how she could possibly have offended her, was a mystery to Marion Arthur: not so to the major; who was but too familiar with similar, and even more outrageous exhibitions of jealousy, to doubt what it was that distorted his wife's features so horribly. Fortunately for all parties my grandfather came up, and desiring his son to seek a lady, whom he named, for his partner in the next dance, took Miss Arthur away to play at chess with him in a corner. I shall never forget Mrs. William Vere's look of furious passion as they all turned away; the beautiful fan she held was crushed with the vehement pressure of her clenched hand. It was really a terrible sight; and I unconsciously caught my grandmother's hand for protection as I gazed upon it. No persuasions or entreaties could induce the Spanish wife to dance, although she was passionately fond of the amusement, and really excelled in it; her whole attention was absorbed in watching her husband, who, from sad experience of his wife's disposition, was most careful never even to speak to his old play-fellow again during that evening. At last she appeared composed, and went into the supper-room much in her usual manner, for she saw my uncle at the lower end of the apartment assiduously attending upon two old ladies, and Miss Arthur earnestly conversing with a young officer of hussars, who had taken an ice to her at a side table.

It had been arranged that my father, uncle, and two or three of the married gentlemen should sleep this night at the lodge, in order that additional beds might be made up for the ladies.

their wives' rooms. About four o'clock in the morning, therefore, when the party separated, only some went off to their homes, while others thankfully accepted a resting-place at Ingerdylne; the men who were destined for lodge-keepers, getting together in the supper-room to summon courage for their turn-out, by an extra glass of champagne.

All was quiet in the house, except an occasional peal of laughter from the revelers, who lingered in the supper-room, when a succession of shrill and piercing screams rang through the mansion. In a few minutes, the sleepers had started from bed and sofa; and the passages and landing-places were thronged with hurried and half-dressed visitors, pale with amazement and alarm, each eagerly seeking from the other an explanation of the startling sounds that yet rang in their ears.

"It is Josephine—my wife's voice," exclaimed my uncle, who, with his companions, had rushed up from below; "where is she?"

"In the yellow room at the other end of the house, with Miss Arthur and Mrs. Sackville," was the reply.

"Miss Arthur and my sister? Gracious God! let me pass," cried Major Vere, as another thrilling shriek rang through the house, and he sprang forward along the passage, as if some frightful idea had struck him.

Every body followed, and as they passed my door, I joined them; for the noise terrified me, and I dared not remain alone.

When the door of the yellow room was thrown open, the first object we saw by the fire-light, was Mrs. William Vere, standing in the middle of the room, covered only with a white wrapper, over which her thick black hair fell like a mantilla; her feet were bare, her hands clenched, and she was screaming frantically. Leaning upon the writing table, her face alternately pale and flushed, stood Marion Arthur, with tears pouring down her cheeks, and sobbing bitterly. Just between them, with a countenance expressive of scornful indignation, was my mother, quivering from head to foot with emotion, her eyes flashing with mingled anger and contempt.

"Josephine, what is the matter? Are you ill? speak!" cried her husband.

"Ill? Mad, I think!" exclaimed my mother, bitterly; and she turned to Marion.

"I am dying! Poison—poison!" screamed Josephine, furiously.

"Poison! where? what?" exclaimed several.

"Here! dere! In dis cup. See!—look!" shouted the Spanish woman, holding up a small china cup, in which remained a few drops of some white liquid.

"This! where did you get it? Who gave it you?" asked my uncle, quickly.

"She did: for you! serpent! English monster!" raved his wife, pointing to Miss Arthur, with the accent and look of a maddened fury; "oh! oh! I shall die!" and she evidently writhed in pain. "Traitor! murderer!" she cried, and, springing suddenly forward, clung to her husband, as if to strangle him; while those who were not paralyzed with horror, strove to release him from her grasp.

"Alice, what is all this? for God's sake,

speak!" said my grandfather, turning to his daughter.

Upon hearing her sister-in-law's name, the Spaniard turned round, and, tossing her elf-like hair back from her face, screamed out, her mouth literally foaming with rage and excitement: "Seize her! take her!—she help—dey both do it!"

"Silence, madam! For your own sake, if you are not mad, be silent!" said my mother, advancing toward her.

"Keep away! she will stab me! dey have poison me!" and again she shrieked in a paroxysm of pain and fury, while the spectators gathered together in little groups, amazed, but now less frightened at the scene, which began to assume a ludicrous aspect.

"If you can explain this, Alice, do, and quickly," exclaimed my uncle, speaking between his teeth, as he saw the perspiration starting upon his wife's brow.

"I will," said Marion Arthur, who advanced, with a face colorless as marble, and nearly as rigid.

"Mrs. William Vere, having incautiously taken at supper some champagne, which disagreed with her, complained, when she came to bed, of the acidity which it had created, and asked Mrs. Sackville what would relieve it. I recommended magnesia, and, as every one was gone to bed, Mrs. Sackville went into the nursery to bring some from her children's medicine chest. I mixed it, telling Mrs. William Vere what it was, and she drank it, and then laid down and fell asleep. Some time after, while Mrs. Sackville and I were sitting talking by the fire, she awoke with a loud scream, sprang out of bed, seized the cup, and insisted that she was poisoned. At first, we thought that it was a frightful dream, and we tried to take the cup away, and soothe her; but this only made her more violent, and we found that she really meant the horrible thing she was saying. I think I need not assure you all, who know me so well"—and here her voice was broken, and the tears fell fast—"that there is no ground for her accusation: no one can believe me or Alice guilty of so dreadful a crime."

"It is arsenic! arsenic!" cried the wretched woman, who had interrupted Miss Arthur's explanation twenty times by her passionate and frantic exclamations.

"William, silence your wife for her own sake, if she has not bewitched you past hope," said my mother, angrily.

"You kill me for her to marry him!" screamed Josephine, in a frenzy: "you hate me, and she love him; I hear her say so."

"Madam! Mrs. William Vere! for God's sake—" cried Marion, as she burst into a passion of tears.

"William, if you are not lost to all manliness, take your wife away, or compel her to unsay these false and infamous charges," exclaimed Mrs. Sackville.

"It matters not—no one believes them," said my grandfather, sorrowfully.

"Dey shall! dey shall! I will say it is arsenic; you shall be try for de poison," shouted the Spaniard.

"Nonsense, Josephine; you are mad to say such things," said my uncle, sternly.

"As she likes," replied my mother; "only, in case of this absurdity being carried further, it will be as well to secure these things. Mr. Comberton, you are a magistrate, I know: will you take charge of this cup; this bottle, from which the powder was taken, and this jug from which Miss Arthur poured the water to mix it? And now, if you do not think it necessary to take us into custody, we had better adjourn the meeting, and permit our friends to retire to bed; from which I do not think this wretched farce is sufficiently interesting to detain them longer."

"There is a spare bed in the nursery," said Mrs. Vere; "Marion and Alice can sleep there."

"I will go home," said Marion; "I can not stay here, now."

"No, Marion; we will both go to-morrow; but to-night we must stay here," replied my mother.

"No, no; I can not, indeed."

"Oh! the tale is too ridiculous to drive you away: do not treat us as if you thought we believed it," said several of the company, pressing toward her; for her sweet and gentle manners had made her a general favorite. So eager were all to assure her of their esteem and confidence at this moment, and to mark the disgust they felt at the Spaniard's outrageous charges, that not one seemed to be aware of the strange spectacle each helped to make in that oddly attired assembly.

CHAPTER VII.

No one was surprised the next morning to find that Mrs. William Vere breakfasted in her own room, or that the major spent an hour with his father, closeted in the library, and afterward mounted a horse which he had ordered to be in waiting, and rode off at full speed toward the town.

Philip and I wandered about all that uncomfortable day, without being noticed by any one. A sort of feeling that they were in the way, hung over every body: the last night's scene was too vividly present to their minds, with all its ludicrous terrors, to permit them to talk freely upon other subjects; while the respect and sorrow felt for their host restrained every one, even the most thoughtless, from alluding to that.

Immediately after luncheon, while Philip and I were sitting in the library, talking over the events of the preceding night, and conjecturing how it would all end, my father and grandfather entered the room, and, not seeing us, closed the door and began to converse.

"I have wished to see you privately, sir," said my father, "to inform you that, after the insult which Mrs. William Vere thought fit to offer last night to my wife, it appears to be my plain duty to remove Mrs. Sackville from this house. It is impossible that she can continue to associate with a woman so regardless of truth and propriety; and, as the youngest child, it is, perhaps, the duty of Alice to withdraw."

"Does Alice know of this?" asked my grandfather.

"Yes, it is her own wish. It is but too evident to her that peace can not be preserved in a house inhabited by persons of such incompatible dispositions and opposing interests as are at

present assembled here. My wife and children have enjoyed a most happy home with you and my mother-in-law for many months, for which I most heartily thank you. But, as I will not suffer Alice to be the sport of malice and vulgarity, so neither can I consent to pain and embarrass you with the conflicting claims of your children. My wife, as I said before, is the youngest, and it is right, in such a case as this, that she should give way, and be the one to leave Ingerdyne."

I could see my grandfather's eyes fixed upon my father's handsome face with a more cordial expression than usual; it seemed to say:

"Well, Irishman, I did not expect this from you. I am pleased with you."

For a minute there was a silence; then my grandfather said:

"You have spoken of this to no one?"

"Except Alice, to no one."

"I am glad of it, because there is no necessity to add more pain to that which Major Vere is already suffering. I am obliged to you for the proper and considerate view you have taken of your wife's position, as regards what is due to herself, as well as to her brother and to me. And, looking at the affair as you do, what I am going to say will be no matter of surprise to you: I do not hesitate to declare that it is not more impossible for Alice to live here with that unhappy person, than for me. I have, accordingly, arranged with my son that he shall take a house in London for a few weeks, and thence return to Belgium. It must be infinitely better for all parties that, under such circumstances, they should reside in a foreign land."

My father bowed, silently; for there was an expression of grief and mortification upon the old man's face that forbade any sympathy but that shown by respectful acquiescence.

"You will inform Alice of this, Captain Sackville," continued my grandfather; "and beg her not to speak to her mother or me upon the subject. Be assured that I estimate highly the right feeling toward her brother and myself, shown by you both in this affair: but I came to the resolution I have expressed, without reference to her stay. I could not live with so violent a person as Mrs. William Vere, and I do not choose to be driven from home by my children. Alice will see that I should have acted precisely as I have done, if she had not been here."

My father bowed again, simply saying—

"You shall be obeyed, sir. Can I tell my wife when?"

"My son and his family leave this place to-morrow morning," answered Mr. Vere abruptly.

Philip and I gazed upon each other in mute dismay, and when they were gone he started up, exclaiming—

"I knew how it would be. Nobody can live with my mother. I thought we were too happy for it to last: but I won't go, Florence—I won't."

"Oh, Phil., what can you do?" said I, crying.

"Do, Flor.? why refuse! And if they try to make me go, I'll run away until they are gone, and then come back here, and wait for an opportunity of getting to Sir Hugh. I have plenty of money."

"But they are your father and mother," I urged with some indistinct idea that his intention was wrong.

"Flor., they sent me away when I was a baby for their own convenience; they forgot me first, I'll forget them now."

It was well for my peace of mind that Philip had told me this; for the next morning, when he was sought for to accompany his parents, he was nowhere to be found. He had not mentioned his determination to any one but me; and I dared not reveal it. The consternation of the whole family was extreme, until the housemaid brought down a note, which she had discovered upon the truant's pillow, addressed to his father. It ran thus: "You have never loved me, and I am miserable with you, so I have determined to go back to Sir Hugh. I have plenty of money for the voyage, and know my road, so do not be uneasy. If you will write in a month's time, your letter will reach me at Sir Hugh's house."

It would be difficult to express the various feelings with which the assembled party listened to this audacious epistle. Mrs. William Vere raved furiously, railing against her son for his ingratitude and wickedness; forgetting that she had not taught him better, and that he had learned neglect of duty from her example; while his father threatened him with severe punishment, and predicted all sorts of future evils. Many secretly praised his spirit in escaping from such a home; and a very few grieved over the disobedient and undutiful child, and silently prayed God to pardon him.

I was the only one who really missed him, and bitter was my sorrow at losing Philip's society; for though he had been often domineering and dictatorial, yet, except old Cicely, I had never had any other friend to talk to as a companion; and I felt then, for the first time, that sense of loneliness and desolation of heart which I have experienced so often since.

A week after this event my father returned to Ireland, and soon after Christmas we followed him. I remember how unwilling my mother was to go, and how she put off the journey from day to day, seeming to dread it as much as if she were going to encounter some terrible doom, instead of returning to her husband's home.

This impressed me greatly, and awakened a strange feeling toward both my parents. I could not tell which was wrong, but I felt instinctively that such disunion was a shocking thing; and thus was destroyed, in my very infancy, that reverential affection and devout confidence which is due from children to their parents, and without which the holy ties of filial love do not bind the heart, or restrain the will.

Never was disgust more visible in my mother's face and manner than when she returned to her Irish home. The slovenly habits and reckless irregularity of the people seemed, to her dissatisfied mind, to have increased a hundred-fold during her absence. And although every thing was in just the same state as it had been when, nine years before, she had rushed to her husband's country as to a refuge and a home; yet the charm which had then lent beauty even to its faults was gone, and she looked upon all around as hateful and revolting.

Certainly there was a very striking contrast

between Ingerdyne and Athlone. The disproportioned rooms with their damaged and worn-out furniture, ill-fitting doors and starred window-panes; the badly matched and broken crockery, the untidy, quarrelsome and shoeless servants, were each and all in melancholy contrast to the well-appointed household, the comforts and elegances of Ingerdyne. Much of all this might have been improved by a cheerful, loving, and energetic spirit; but, unfortunately, such was not the temper of the presiding genius of the place, who seemed to take a pettish pride in letting things go their own uncomfortable way, and where it was possible, even become worse.

By means of a bribe, the promise of doubling her already handsome wages, my mother had induced her English nurse to come with her to Ireland, declaring that there was no one there, fit to be trusted with her darling Helen. She seemed to have forgotten Cicely, who had been to me so faithful and tender a guardian and friend, and the poor old woman bitterly inveighed against the cold unloving hearts and ungrateful memories of the Saxons.

"It's all as one," she would say, "as if I had killed the precious jiwil intirely; and St. Bridget knows I love her as my own. Many's the night I walked about these ould rooms hushowing her to sleep, when the mother's been warm in the bed: and now I'm not fit to have care of the other! Oh! but it's the English that have no hearts."

Even I, her nursling and pride, was now not altogether satisfactory to her; for she looked with jealous eyes upon my increased tidiness and love of order, and it worried her to see my "fornin ways," as she called them.

"They'll spile you, my colleen!" said she, pettishly to me one day, "wid their fuss and their puttin's away. It's enough to wear the life out o' one to be forever tidyin' and tidyin', as if the pace of the world was in keeping chairs straight. Besides, it isn't for the likes o' you to be doin' sich work as that, waitin' on yourself instead of making them crathurs of English do your biddin'. It brakes my heart intirely to see the change that's come over ye, since ye went to that land o' Cromwell. Oh, Miss Flory dear, sure ye'll nivir turn from the ways o' yer father's fathers to folly the English."

Notwithstanding these pathetic appeals, I had seen too much of English comfort to undervalue it; especially now that the want of it was constantly present to me. So, although I still loved Cicely with all my heart, I persevered in the few "English ways" I had learned, and went on improving.

Meanwhile, my sister grew up a fair, lovely blue-eyed child, the evident darling of my mother, and the admiration of every body. Kept aloof from all contact with the people in whose land she lived, it was my mother's pride that she had no accent in her sweet lisping voice that would have betrayed her country to the nicest ear. "No one can ever say that Helen is Irish," was her perpetual boast; and many were the fears she expressed, when my sister and I were playing together, lest she should learn from me the hateful dialect of our father's people.

In time Helen found this out, and when she

wished to be mischievous, would try to mimic me; and, if any thing angered her, she would push me from her, calling me "wild Irish," and say that I should teach her to be as bad. Happily for me, I had even then a passionate love of the beautiful, and in my admiration of her loveliness I could not resent her unkindness; and this frail bond kept peace between us, for with all my natural yearning for love, I could not feel a strong or deep affection for a sister who seemed to monopolize my mother's thoughts and fondness, and to look upon me in any light rather than as an object of love. And yet, with all her preference for Helen, my mother loved me in a degree. She praised my intelligence and powers of mind, foretelling that I should be a clever self-dependent woman, brave in adversity, but ungracious in prosperity. I was too proud, she said, for peace; my atmosphere was strife. How often in after days did I recall this prophesy, and wonder whether the clouds of coming trials had even then been foreshadowed upon my brow.

I had now become by practice a bold and fearless horsewoman, and although so very young and light a weight, was able easily to control the highly-trained animals given me to ride. Often and often my father and I were out together for hours, scouring the wild moors and leaping the awkward wall fences of the fields; while I, proud of his hearty praise, stifled every misgiving, checked every impulse of fear, and rode at every thing as boldly as he did. I believe I would have faced death itself sooner than have heard him call me coward or laugh at me for a baby, so that his pride in my courage and daring soon became as great as my mother's in Helen's un-Irish tones and lovely face. I have often marveled since, how my mother could trust me upon such high-couraged horses as those I always rode; creatures over whom I could have no control at all, except what their perfect training gave me: to whom my weight was as nothing, and mounted upon which, I looked a mere pigmy. Perhaps she placed her faith in my fairy patrons, trusting them to guard me from danger in their own mountains, and in this belief resigned me to my fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL this time I have made no mention of my governess, who was the daughter of a lieutenant of my father's regiment, and was glad to assist her parents by devoting some hours daily to my education. She was a firm, yet gentle creature, actuated by high principles and a spirit of patient endurance; she commanded my respect from the first, and soon obtained the whole love and obedience of my heart. She it was who first taught me Christianity: not but that I had been always taken to church—when it was convenient, and the weather was dry; but that practical, self-controlling Christian spirit of which I had hitherto known nothing, I learned from Miss Northey. She taught me the sin of disobedience, and the curse which sooner or later visits the undutiful child; she taught me self-denial, and the blessing which follows an act of duty done

at the sacrifice of self; she talked to me as to one more woman than child, and told me how happy she was to be able to make some return to her parents for the love and care which they had bestowed upon her infancy and education; she told me of the happiness of her own home, and repeated the loving words in which the dear ones there strove to acknowledge and repay her labors for them.

"But, Florence," she would say, "that does not alter my duty, though it makes it pleasant and light; for even if papa and mamma were harsh and cruel, instead of being good and kind, my duty as their child would be the same: no sternness on their part could change it. We work to God, and not to ourselves, and his laws are unchangeable."

In every way, and at every opportunity she strove to impress this upon me. It has since seemed to me as if she knew that some day I should be called upon to drink to the dregs the bitter but wholesome cup of self-denial, and thus prepared me for it. While I loved her so dearly that her least wish was a law to me, her approbation my greatest reward, and her love my dearest treasure, rebellion against her will was impossible; and seeing this, she often made some kindness to be shown by me to Helen, the payment of my obedience to herself; indeed, half my time was taken up in ministering to my sister's whimsical fancies.

Under her firm and tender rule, I was happy; my lessons were a real pleasure to me, and, much as I loved my rides, I would at any time have given them up to study with Miss Northey. But she was too judicious and right-minded to require this; and, while she strove to confine my equestrian ardor within the bounds of lady-like propriety, she never sought to disgust me with my father's favorite pursuit, nor to set up a contest in my mind between his authority and her own.

For a considerable period after leaving Ingerdyne, I heard nothing of my uncle or cousins, until I one day received a note from Philip, inclosed a letter to my mother from her father. It was dated from Gibraltar, and informed me of his safe arrival there, and the hearty welcome he had received from Sir Hugh; of the correspondence which had passed between that gentleman and his father relative to himself, and the happy termination of the affair, which had resulted in permission for him to remain with his godfather. He told me of the studies he was pursuing, the feats of horsemanship he could perform, and the height to which he had grown; and expressed the anxiety he felt to be old enough to receive his commission, and the grief it was to him that he couldn't make all the intervening years go on side by side together, so that the whole might be got over in twelve months. He concluded by desiring me to write and tell him every thing that had happened since he left me.

Oh, the delight of our first letter! The importance it gives us—at least in our own eyes—the perpetual folding and unfolding it; the incessant appeals to every body if there ever was any thing so kind and clever before; the happy fidgetiness of answering it; the talk about what shall be said. All this happens but once. The second letter and the third are as nothing: it is the first which, with all its circumstances, live

fresh in our memories forever. How many, many letters I wrote in answer to Philip, before I concocted one to please me! Try as I would, mine were the epistles of a child, while his was that of an educated and intelligent youth, fluent and full of amusement. At last, with the help of Miss Northey and the dictionary, I managed to cover, in large hand, three sides of a sheet of paper, which I called a letter, and intrusted to the care of the post-office, though not without some misgivings as to its responsibility for so great a charge.

The next few months passed without the occurrence of a single incident worthy of record; but just as I attained my ninth year, my mother received a letter from the apothecary attending at Ingerdyne, informing her of the sudden death of her mother, and expressing her father's desire that she would come to him instantly: this, of course, took us all to England.

It was a cold and dreary March day upon which we arrived. The winds had been so high as to delay our passage considerably, and we did not reach Ingerdyne until the day after the funeral. How wretched the old place looked—no leaves, no flowers, nothing but a rushing wind bending the young trees to the earth, or tearing off the branches of the more stubborn ones. The fir-apples, scattered from the boughs of the pines, nearly covered the drive and the moat. The carriage-road was strewn with branches of the brittle acacias, and taller shrubs which grew by its side, and the swing we had left upon the boughs of the old lime rocked to and fro, creaking in the storm. Out of doors, all was rage and contest, as if the world was wrestling with the elements; but within all was deep and silent gloom. The whole house looked in mourning. Death seemed to have saddened every face, and muffled every foot that approached us, and I felt more desolate and unhappy than I had ever done in my life before.

Helen, being tired with the journey, soon went to bed; Miss Northey remained in Ireland; my mother was with her father, and I was left alone in the great dusky library, listening to the howling of the wind as it roared down the huge old chimney. I sat in one of the large, deep chairs, and curled myself up on the seat, hiding in the shadow of its tall back and sides, which formed to my fancy a giant-like protection from the vague terrors without. I could hear nothing but the wind; the house was as silent as a cathedral, and to my excited senses the dim room in which I was, looked quite as large. My heart beat painfully, and I would have given any thing for courage to cross the room, run into the passage, and call for some one to come to me; but I dared not. The darkness grew deeper and heavier; the owls began to cry in the old elms before the windows, and the boughs creaked mournfully in the tempest. Just above me was the room in which my poor grandmother had died, and exactly over my head stood the black trestles upon which the coffin had rested. I knew that they were there, for I had seen them not two hours before. A very little effort of fancy brought them before me while I lay coiled up in the chair; and ere long I had conjured up a host of grinning skeletons, making faces at me over their tall grim forms. I shut my eyes, but could not keep them closed, for

the room seemed to be full of strange sounds and fearful sights, and I glared into it with the fixed stare of idiocy.

In this state I fell asleep, and dreamed that I was in the lonely old church on the hill in which my grandmother was buried, and that it was midnight. All was dark and dreary. I was alone, trying to find my way out. Suddenly I thought a yellow light broke through the ground, and from an open grave, my grandmother appeared in her death-clothes, bearing a torch. She chased me round and round, and just as I had climbed up to reach a window, she caught me with her ghastly hand. I awoke, with a start and a scream, and found my grandfather standing before me, holding me with one hand, and a lighted candle in the other.

"Florence, my poor child! you *here*?" he said, more tenderly than he had ever before spoken to me; "how came you to be left here and forgotten?"

"Oh, grandpapa, dear grandpapa! do not leave me; I am so frightened," I cried, clinging to him in terror.

"And no wonder, child; where is your maid? I thought you were in bed long ago. The fire out; no lights! No wonder you were frightened. Come with me, dear Florence."

I seized his hand and kissed it. The action was one of impulse: he looked so pale and so unhappy, that my usual fear of his sternness gave place to a feeling of love and pity. Such a thing was so new to both of us, that he gazed upon me at first with astonishment, as if wondering what had happened to make me so affectionate; then seeing the commiseration of my heart written on my face, the tears crowded into his eyes, and he patted my head and blessed me.

From that moment I loved him dearly. Stern, fidgety, or unreasonable he never seemed to me again; but good, and kind, and generous, as he really was. For his sake, I strove to overcome the Irish accent, which annoyed him; to walk steadily, instead of running along like a wild thing; to tie my bonnet-strings, to have my gloves mended, and not to rejoice in the luxury of shoes down at heel. And in return (for he saw all this, and valued it in one so untaught and full of impulse), he tried to love me; but, although I am sure his efforts were sincere, still he never succeeded thoroughly. Old prejudices, the growth of a life, are not easily overcome, and his dislike to the people of the Sister Isle was almost a mania.

Helen had her mother's soft sweet English face and tone, but I was too much like my Irish father. My grandfather's voice altered its tone when addressing and fondling her: she seemed truly the child of his old age, the Benjamin of his heart. But to me, patient and forbearing as he was, the effort to be so, the evident wish to perform his duty even against his feelings, was too apparent; I could not but see it, and I felt it deeply. Like my mother, he thought me a clever, brave girl, full of right, but uncontrolled impulses; one who in the olden time might have grown up a heroine, worthy to stand side by side with Lady Derby at Lathom, or, in the present degenerate days, might perversely break my neck over a brick wall, sooner than ride und to an open gate.

There was a tone of raillery in his speeches to me, which mortified me grievously, because, although I felt there was truth in them, yet I knew that I was not so wild and lawless as he thought; and, while I was proud of his pride in me, and felt that it was a thing to court and prize, I was often heart-stung at the tone in which he spoke to me: so different to that in which he talked to Helen. "Pet," "May-bird," "Darling," were all names to which she answered as to her own; and his smile, as he caressed and played with her, was such as I would have given my right hand to receive from him. Still I loved him: for my heart told me he was upright, and good, and kind, and that he was unconscious of the injustice of his feeling toward me. In some things, too, I had a cordial sympathy with him: in his lofty pride, his scorn of money, his old-world reverence for the names of history, and his lofty ideas of what befitted a gentleman.

Whatever feelings, thoughts, and ideas have been altered or erased from my mind during my battle with the world, this early honor and esteem for antiquity of family, has never lessened. Indeed, I am more and more assured of the real value of good birth and ancient descent, and that none despise it but those who have it not. The very men who most loudly declaim against this feeling—calling it folly, and sneering at it as a source of pride where there is no better to be found; who court the mob with clap-traps about equal rights and the people's dignity, are the most captious and jealous respecting their own origin. Nothing pleases them more than to claim kindred with the great ones of the earth, nor mortifies them more than to be deemed plebeian, and classed with the very people they are deluding.

When a man knows that, shoot his arrows right and left as he will, he can hurt nothing belonging to himself, it makes him wonderfully bold and daring in the fight. And that is the reason why revolutionists generally belong to one of two classes—the well born, who, from poverty, loss of social position, or love of popularity, seek, in the clamorous applause of a mob, the distinction they have lost, or can not win in their own sphere, and are content to be the idols of a rabble whom they despise, certain that they shall never be confounded with those they are duping, and relying for their influence upon the birth they affect to scorn; or the bold, reckless, and ambitious son of the people, who, too idle to work, too extravagant for his means, or too dissatisfied with the social position in which God has placed him to do his best in it, strikes at all order, scoffs at his superiors, and seeks to pull down the barriers of society, certain that, so his life be spared, he must be a gainer in the struggle. These two sorts of men can alone afford to affect contempt of good birth: the one because, say what he will, he can not deprive himself of it; the other because he has it not, and do what he will, can neither gain nor lose it.

CHAPTER IX.

How much the absence of a familiar form alters the aspect of a place. My grandmother

had never taken an active part in any thing going on at Ingerdyne, she had seldom offered an opinion, rarely went from home, and hardly ever, that I remember, was met by us out of her own particular rooms and sheltered acacia walk; yet, now that she was gone, we seemed to miss her every where. We now found how often we had deferred to her, how often appealed to her gentle justice, how often received smiling recognition as we met her in our races across the shrubbery, how often been rewarded for an unusually quiet visit to the drawing-room, by a great almond comfit, of which she kept a store in her silver knitting-case; and, now that from all these places and occurrences she was forever absent, we became suddenly conscious that some great charm was gone.

It was long before the gap in the social circle left by her departure closed up again: indeed, it never quite did so; for every day and every hour, the poor, the sorrowful, and the misguided, needed her more and more. Gentle, mild, and peace-loving, her influence had been felt by us all, though we had not been conscious of it; and now that she had left us, there was a blank in many places.

My grandfather seldom named her; never, if he could avoid it, and then as briefly as possible. I remember that I wondered at this, thinking that he had forgotten her; but one day when I had been playing upon the lawn, and, tired with the heat, went gently in through one of the drawing-room windows, intending to lie down on the great sofa, I saw my grandfather with his head bent down upon the little table by which his wife used to sit, and upon which still lay her knitting-case, scent-bottle, and letter-basket. He did not move, and I thought he was asleep; but, as I crossed the room on tiptoe to get to the sofa, he started and looked up, and I saw that his eyes were dim and heavy, and the eyelashes wet with tears.

"What are you doing here, Florence?" he asked, rather angrily. "What do you want?"

I murmured some indistinct reply.

"Go to your nursery: that is the proper place for you. Go."

I obeyed. Thenceforward, though he never named his wife in my presence, I knew that she was not forgotten; and an idea began to possess me, which seemed never to occur to any one else, that he was pining away—dying for want of his old companion. They had lived together forty years, had joyed over the same pleasures, sorrowed over the same griefs, and shared the same memories; and now that one was gone, the survivor had lost the connecting link in that long chain, which bound the present with the past. His companion, friend, and faithful helpmate, had left his side: the dear familiar face which had so long smiled upon his entrance, and brightened at his voice; the graceful figure which even in age was beautiful for its gentle dignity; the winning tones which had seldom spoken to him save in affectionate admiration and approval of his doings, would never in this world gladden his heart again. Others might smile, and soothe, and tend; but none like her. She was gone, and the world was desolate for him.

One hot June morning, about three months after the funeral, my mother and I were sitting together in the library, when Mr. Roberts,

family apothecary, was announced. He had come to see a servant who was ill, and now appeared to make his report. After the state of the patient had been duly commented upon, and just as the surgeon was rising to take leave, my mother stopped him, saying:

"My father looks ill, I think, Mr. Roberts: have you observed how very pale he is?"

"Yes, he has changed sadly since Mrs. Vere's death. I fear that he grieves too much for her."

"Too much! You are mistaken, I assure you. He has not mentioned my poor mother's name half a dozen times since I came. Indeed, I have sometimes felt hurt to see how completely he appears to have forgotten her."

"Mr. Vere is not very communicative, Mrs. Sackville, and would not, I imagine, be likely to make his sorrow a matter of conversation."

"Not with every one; but with me, I can not conceive any reason why he should not. Besides, if he had been grieving, I must have discovered it. You are wrong, Mr. Roberts: his pale looks are caused by this hot and exhausting weather."

"Perhaps so. Will you make my respectful compliments to him, and say that my patient is going on as well as I could wish?"

The doctor had not long been gone when my grandfather entered, and I observed that my mother almost started, as, aroused by Mr. Roberts's suggestions, she gazed upon her father's wan, thin features, and sunken eyes. To me they did not appear more striking than they had done for weeks; but to her they wore a new and terrible expression, and, unable to restrain her feelings, she burst into tears.

"Why, Alice, what is the matter?" he asked; but she could not speak, and he turned to me.

"What is it, Florence? Is your mother ill?"

"No, grandpapa, but—"

"Silence, Florence," exclaimed my mother: "go into the nursery, go away; go ~~this~~ instant," and she pushed me hastily toward the door. I do not know which of us was most astonished at this vehemence; for my mother was generally calm in voice and manner: but she evidently feared that I should betray to her father her suspicions of his illness, and therefore she hurried me away, to preserve the secret.

What passed in that interview, after I left the room, I do not know, but after dinner, when I was playing in the garden, I met my grandfather in the acacia walk, his wife's favorite haunt, leaning upon my mother's arm, and tears were rolling fast down her cheeks. Helen was with them, and I observed that as they walked my grandfather's hand rested upon her head. My heart was stung; and instead of running forward to meet them, I turned away and ran back to the place I had left—a great box-tree, one of whose lower branches stretched across the dark, quiet moat.

The next day, I heard in the nursery that my grandfather had not gone down to breakfast. Late in the afternoon I saw him sitting in an easy chair under the acacias, with Helen at his feet, making daisy balls, and my mother at his side. He looked very ill, and I went up to him.

"Flor! Flor! look, you are treading on my flowers," screamed Helen.

"How awkward you are, Florence!" said my mother; "could not you see where you were ~~ing~~?" And how untidy you are! have you

been at play with the bushes?" and she glanced at my ruffled hair and disordered dress.

"Flor. is always in a mess," said Helen; "'wild Irish,' as grandpapa calls her."

My blood boiled, and I retorted, passionately, "If I am Irish, Helen, so are *you*. I'm not ashamed of my father's country, if you are; and I'd sooner be wild like the Irish, than cold-hearted like the English."

"Could-hearted!" sarcastically repeated Helen, laughing. "Oh, grandpapa, listen to the brogue!"

My grandfather smiled faintly as the child mimicked my words and accent, looking up into his face the while, with her lovely Saxon countenance. My eyes kindled; I felt them flash like fire, and with a sudden impulse of fury, I raised my hand to strike Helen; but an expression, half-surprise, half-disgust, which came over my grandfather's features, arrested the action, and bursting into tears of rage, I rushed away.

I learned afterward, that when I was gone, my poor grandfather had foretold I should cause my mother much uneasiness and sorrow: that I promised to be all that was reckless, unloving, fiery, and uncontrollable—a sort of human whirlwind; and yet, he added, that I was clever and courageous: that kind of character which would have been good in a man, but that the womanly virtues of affection, gentleness, and forbearance were foreign to me.

How little they read my heart, who said and listened to this! Unloving! my whole soul was aching and pining for sympathy; and for any talents I had, I would have given them all, to be loved and cherished as Helen was. It seems to me that I am the easiest person on earth to be comprehended, and yet all my life long, people have misunderstood and misrepresented me.

The following day my grandfather was worse, the next he was wholly confined to his bed; and a physician being summoned, he advised that my father should be sent for: in another week we all knew that the patient's life was now to be counted by hours.

Sad and weary, beyond any days I had ever known, were those which followed now. The heat of the weather was intense; the sky was a deep liquid blue, which seemed infinite, as if you could look through it into heaven. Nothing, except the grasshoppers, appeared to stir, from the time the dew was burned off the earth, until it rose again in the evening. The cattle stood under the trees in the park, stamping their impatient feet until the turf was worn bare, and whisking their sides with their long tails, to dislodge the stinging flies; but even then never ventured out of the shade for a moment. The windows of the house were all open, while the fierce heat was kept out of most of the rooms by the green outside shades. Owing to the intense heat of the weather, and the gloom of my grandfather's illness, every one seemed to have lost spirits and energy. Nothing was done that could be avoided; and even in the servants' hall the sound of laughter was hushed.

Night and day my mother watched by her father: neither heat nor fatigue could drive her from his room; she caused a sofa to be placed there, and dressed in a cool, white wrapper, strove to forget the oppression of the sultry weather. Once only every day I saw her, when

she came down stairs with Dr. Leslie, to hear his opinion and receive instructions. I used to stand in the hall and watch for them, to ask after my grandfather. Dr. Leslie always replied to my inquiry; for my mother seemed not to hear me, she was so overpowered with grief and anxiety. Her face was deathly pale, and her hair, which she usually wore in ringlets, was now gathered together in a knot behind, so that her countenance, deprived of its usual shade, looked strange and terrible to me.

My father soon came, and the next day I heard that he had, by Dr. Leslie's wish, informed my grandfather of his danger. I learned, too, that he had requested permission to send for my uncle, but that it had been peremptorily refused.

A week after his arrival I was sitting alone in the hall by the old rocking-horse, when I heard a great bustle of feet above me, doors quickly opened and shut, bells rang violently, and the next moment I saw a servant run quickly down stairs, and heard him give orders for a man to ride off at full speed for Dr. Leslie. He was scarcely gone when Mr. Roberts came; but, before I could speak to him, my mother appeared at the head of the stairs, looking like an apparition, and called to him, in tones of agony, to come up instantly.

For a few moments, all was still again; then there was a scuffle and a piercing cry; then another; and a fall, as of some heavy weight upon the floor. Frantic with terror I rushed up the stairs. My grandfather's room was upon the first landing, the door was just thrown open as I reached it, and I ran in.

Mr. Roberts and my father were in the act of raising my mother from the floor, upon which she had fallen in a swoon; the housekeeper was standing weeping by the bed; and, lying upon it, propped up by pillows, was my grandfather. He was dead. I had never seen death before; but the awful change was too terrible to be mistaken. I could not repress a scream.

"Leave the room, Florence," said my father. "You will frighten your mother: go to your sister."

But his commands were unheeded. I was terrified nearly out of my senses. The darkened room; my mother's lifeless form; her pallid features, which even now bore the impress of horror; and the dark curtains twined tightly round the bedposts; the blood which had flowed from an attempt to bleed the patient, and which stained the counterpane and sheets; the ghastly face of the corpse, with its unclosed, glaring eyes; all made so frightful a picture that I could not control my feelings; and I screamed like one distracted. At last, my father, growing angry at what he thought perverseness and disobedience, caught me by the arm, hurried me out of the room and along the passage, pushed me through an open door, locked it and went away.

The place in which I was thus confined was a dark, square sort of hole, in which was a ladder reaching to the inner roof of the house. It was wholly without light, except what peeped from between the slates, and the heat was overpowering. At first I sat down upon the lowest step of the ladder silently, but, after a few minutes, the thought of what I had seen in my

grandfather's room, the vision of his awful aspect, and the distant sounds of life and bustle, while all around me was so still and tomb-like, began to take effect upon me. I became horribly frightened, and in a little time my terror grew into frenzy, and I kicked against the door with my whole force, screaming wildly. Every now and then I held my breath, to listen if any footstep was coming, and then my heart beat violently; but all was quiet, and in a little time even the distant sounds died away.

From infancy I have had an insane horror of spiders: the sight of one would make me run like a hare; and the touch of one upon me would cause me to faint. Once, a friend of my father's, who ridiculed this fear, and I dare say, thought it affectation, put upon my uncovered shoulder one of that long-legged tribe which haunt the gardens in the summer-time. I turned my head at its tickling movement, and the moment I saw it, fell down insensible—I never screamed; the shock at once overpowered me, and I lay in a swoon for hours.

I had not long been shut up, when the thought of the spiders, that might even then be descending upon me with their hideous, weaving, grasping legs, occurred to me. The idea made me frantic, and I redoubled my cries and blows upon the door. I felt as if I were going mad; the whole place seemed to be blazing with a red light, in which huge spiders swung and dangled. I shrieked and prayed like a maniac, till at last I heard little feet run by, then stop, and a voice say—"Flory, is it you?"

It was Helen.

"Helen—Helen, let me out! I am dying; let me out."

In a moment the key was turned, and I rushed from my den. I suppose my looks frightened Helen, for she began to cry, and ran down the passage. I did not follow her, for I was wrought to such a pitch of excitement and terror, that I felt as if nothing but open air, with its sense of freedom, could restore me.

Away then I fled, through the deserted-looking house and gardens, till I reached my favorite seat upon the branch of the old tree by the moat. Once there, I grew calm. The deep blue sky peeping through the canopy of boughs and leaves above, looked so quiet and full of rest; the dark clear water so solemn and unruffled, the trees so motionless and peaceful, that their calm seemed to sink into my heart.

I sat gazing into the moat until my sight became indistinct, and I began to see the sky at my feet, and the trees in the air. In a few minutes more I was asleep.

CHAPTER X.

I WAS awakened by the sound of a carriage driving from the hall door of the house, and turned my head carelessly to look through the trees; when the first object that met my gaze made me spring up with a cry of joy. My cousin Philip was before me.

"Oh Phil., dear Phil., I am so glad: when did you come?" I said, seizing his hand.

"Ten minutes since; the carriage is just going round to the stables. But what brings you here?"

Flor., with that pale face, and those swollen eyes? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, Phil., nothing—now. Oh! how glad I am that you are come," I continued, still holding his hand.

"Well, so am I, then, if you are; else I should wish myself far enough away."

"Why? who brought you? how did you come?"

"How, Flor.? In a carriage, with my god-father; that's how, Flor. And for *why*, I wish I wasn't here—I'll tell you that some day. But come into the house, I want to show you to Sir Hugh."

"How did you know where to find me?" I asked, as we walked to the house.

"I guessed: no one seemed to know, and when I asked your father, he recollected having shut you up somewhere a long time ago. Helen said she had let you out, and so I thought I should find you at the old place. But come along; Sir Hugh will think you don't like to come, if you are so long."

"What is he like, Philip? Is he cross? is he old?"

"No—yes; you'll know when you see him."

In the library, seated in my grandfather's chair, was Sir Hugh Danvers; my mother was sitting beside him, sobbing bitterly, while he held her hand, and tried to soothe her. Helen stood on the other side, looking frightened and puzzled, and Sir Hugh himself seemed full of grief.

As I entered, still holding Philip's hand, I heard Sir Hugh say to my mother, "Don't cry, Alice, my love; your father is in heaven; and you have your husband and children still."

"Here is Flory, Sir Hugh," said Philip, bringing me forward. "You mustn't judge of her by her looks to-day, for she has been frightened to death almost, and has not got over it yet. She's not such a figure as this generally."

As he spoke he laid his hand upon my disheveled hair, and lifted up one of the curls. The old gentleman stared at me with a little surprise, for I daresay I looked half wild, but he stretched out his hand, and said, kindly:

"Come here, Flory; you and I must be friends, for Philip tells me you are a good girl. How like she is to her father," he continued, looking steadily at me, as I held his hand; "she has not a feature of the Veres," and he sighed deeply.

"Oh, Sir Hugh, Flory is the image of my grandfather, when she smiles: smile, Flory, smile," said Philip, eagerly.

But it was impossible. To smile at another's bidding is not, at any time, a very easy thing; but now, it was as much as I could do to help crying. My lips quivered, and in the attempt to obey Philip, I made the most frightful grimaces, till, all of a sudden, struck with the absurdity of the scene, I burst into a fit of hysterical laughter.

Sir Hugh stared, Helen opened her large blue eyes, Philip seemed thunderstruck, and my mother looking hastily up, said reproachfully:

"Is this a time for laughing, Florence? I thought even you had a better heart than to show such unfeeling levity now!"

My eyes fell, for I was ashamed of myself: even at the moment I laughed, I was ashamed of the impulse. I knew that it was from no want of feeling or respect, but solely from nervous excitement and that unfortunate perception of the

ridiculous, which always beset me with its promptings inopportune; yet I felt how heartless and wicked it must have seemed to others. I could not speak, to justify myself. I knew I was censured unjustly; that in this case every one must have acknowledged the reproof seemed amply warranted by my conduct; so I shrunk away, and hid myself in the recess, between the bookcases.

The next morning I rose very early, before any one else was stirring, though the sun had been up some time, and the air was already become hot again. The nursery was at the opposite end of the house to my grandfather's room, and was the only place in which the blinds were not closely shut. I dressed myself as well as I could, moving gently lest I should awake Helen; then opening the door, I went out into the silent and death-tenanted house.

I had resolved to see my grandfather once more, and I feared that if I asked permission it would not be granted; therefore I had risen early, that I might gratify my wish without incurring the pain of a refusal. Just as I reached the landing, into which his room and the other principal bed-chambers opened, the hall clock struck the second quarter past four: I started at the sound, and stood still to gather courage.

The room-door was open, and I could see that the windows were so too, though their lattice-blinds were closed. Little by little, first one hesitating foot, then another, I advanced until I stood inside the death-chamber. All was still as the grave: not even a fly seemed to move. Every thing was in order; the chairs were in their places, the sofa was drawn in a straight line with the wall; the dressing-case had been shut up, and the toilet things put away. The curtains were pushed closely to the head of the bed, so as not to impede the air, and upon the mattress lay the lifeless form covered with a sheet.

At this white object I looked long and earnestly from a distance; till, at last, my fears were quieted, and I went up close to it. When I got there I felt frightened; the outlines of the form beneath had a ghastly significance that appalled me, and I dared not pull down the sheet which hid the face I longed to see. But when I thought of all my dear grandfather's kind words and deeds—aught that had seemed unkind was forgotten—and reflected that very soon he would be shut from my sight forever, fresh courage seemed to nerve me, and resolutely, but with trembling hand, I drew away the sheet.

Who ever looked upon the dead for the first time, without experiencing a sensation of awe, almost amounting to horror? People may talk as they will of death resembling sleep, but it is not so: it never did, and never will. I have since then seen death in all ages—the sinless infant, the blooming girl, and the worn-out, peaceful old man—but in none did it ever wear the look of sleep. And how should it? Is it not a curse? Was not death inflicted as a punishment? And how then can it wear the features of a blessing? How can the judgment denounced upon our forefather's sin, and God's priceless gift to the weary and the wretched, look alike to us? Woe to us if they did. To hear people say of the dead, "Oh, she looks so beautiful, just as if she were asleep!"—seems to me impious: it is calling

things by false names, and speaking lightly of a solemn spectacle—a awful visitation. Death is not terrible to the soul redeemed by Christ, but to the body it is terrible; and that it is so, has been attested, in all ages, by the dread which even the holiest men have felt at its approach.

Calm, very calm, was the aspect of my grandfather's face: the last thoughts of his mind had been peaceful, and his death had evidently been a painless one. The eyes were not quite closed, but they were fearfully sunken; the cheek bones, too, were very prominent, and the lines of the face seemed deeper and longer; while the hair of the head and face had, during the last few days of his life, become as white as snow. The stern, proud look was gone; and so placid was the countenance, that I wondered how I could ever have thought him austere or repelling.

Some impulse suggested to my softened heart that I might say my long-forgotten prayers here, by the bed-side of the dead; and I knelt down and repeated them, with more earnestness than I had ever felt before. Then I rose from my knees, and replacing the sheet, went to sit at the window.

The scent of the roses and syringas came up on the morning air; the webs of the gossamer hung in festoons from spray to spray, glittering with millions of pearly drops; the dew sparkled on the grass, and the birds sung merrily. It was a time and scene full of peace and beauty, and I sat gazing upon it, heedless of the passing hours, until I heard footsteps in the house, and knew that the servants were about. I then closed the lattice, gave one more look at the bed, and went back into the nursery.

That evening I was lying on the grass under a tree upon the lawn, and thinking of Ireland and those I dearly loved there, when a voice calling "Flor," made me spring up, and I saw Sir Hugh and Philip advancing toward me.

My face flushed with vexation; for I knew that my dress was untidy, and my hair ruffled, as I had been tossing restlessly upon the grass, and I felt miserable at the idea that Sir Hugh would think me a wild Irish slattern. It seemed as if I were always to appear to disadvantage before him.

"Flor," said Philip, "come and walk with us in the shrubbery; you seem so lonely."

"Yes, come, my dear," said the old gentleman, holding out his hand.

Before long we were all three seated in my favorite spot; Sir Hugh upon the branch of the box-tree, and Phil. and I at his feet, upon the creeping ivy which carpeted the ground. After a little while I became very happy: all my fear vanished, and I talked as frankly to Philip's kind old friend, as I could have done to Phil. himself.

He asked me several questions about Ireland and my friends there, inquired about my lessons, my riding, and my occupations, and seemed to take a real interest in the replies. Meanwhile, Philip remained silent; he had accomplished his great wish of exhibiting me in my natural state to his friend, and having done so, resigned matters to their own course.

"You must be very lonely here sometimes, Flory, are you not? Have you no playfellows?"

"No; there is nobody nearer than Aston, and that is six miles off."

"Six miles! why, who were those children I saw this morning at the gate with a servant?"

"Oh! they were the Thompsons."

"And who are they?"

"Their father is a tradesman in the town; a grocer, I think. What impertinence in such people to come here!"

"Ay, indeed," said Sir Hugh, smiling; "pray, did they come to offer themselves as playmates for you and Helen?"

"Oh! Sir Hugh, no!" I exclaimed, rather indignantly, for my pride was piqued; "you can't think that. It was to ask after the family: as if it could be any business of theirs how we were! What would dear grandpapa have said to such a thing, I wonder? A grocer's daughters visiting at Ingerdylno!"

"Well, it would not be quite the thing, certainly, Flory, I must acknowledge; and I think, if you ever become Lady Paramount here, there is no fear of your sanctioning such enormities. Still, it must be very dull for you, to be so much alone, for Helen does not seem to be much of a companion to you. Who lives at the white cottage now?"

"Oh, I forgot the white cottage. Such nice people: a lady called Fortescue, and two girls, just as old as I am."

"Well, can not you make companions of them? I suppose the Fortescues are not grocers?"

"Oh, no: Captain Fortescue was a soldier, and Mrs. Fortescue is a daughter of the bishop; but my father and the captain quarreled in Ireland, about some race, and so we are not allowed to speak to Fanny and Mary."

"But you often see them, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, every day; their garden comes to the edge of the shrubbery, and they are always at work in it."

"How is it, then, that you can avoid talking to them sometimes?"

"My father told me not, and I never do. I shouldn't like to deceive any body; it would be mean."

I saw a look of pleasure cross the old man's face as he spoke; and he replied:

"Well said, Flory: there is some good in your character, you little Irish peppercorn, I see. If you have the outrageous pride of the O'Tooles and O'Flahertys, you've some of their noble spirit, too. Phil. was right about you, I believe."

"Oh, Sir Hugh, don't call my pride outrageous. Ciceely says I've got the blood of Brian Borohime in my veins."

"Brian Borohime!" repeated the old gentleman, laughing; "are you sure it's not Cromwell you mean?"

"The rebel! Oh, Sir Hugh, how could I be a true Irish girl, and have such black blood as his in me? But you're laughing at me: you want to set me up, like the great black cat, when the dogs look at her."

"Well, a dog, especially if he's a pointer, being a much more honorable brute than a tabby, I suppose I must not quarrel with you for the comparison, Miss Flory; but I can't say you have hit upon one very flattering to either of us."

"Grandpapa used to say, that nothing in the world was so true as a dog, and that it would be a good thing if men were half as honest."

"And cats?"

"No, no; they are nasty, selfish, spiteful things, like somebody I know very well;" I was going to say whom; my uncle's name trembled on my lips, but an instinct, rather than a thought, arrested it, and I blundered over the conclusion of my speech. Sir Hugh saw it, knew at once whom I meant, and, rising from his seat, exclaimed:

"Well, Miss Flory, I can't say that I should like to make acquaintance with your friend; such amiable people are not in my way. Now, let us go back; and, for the future, just try if you can't allow yourself to be made to look respectable, and keep so. You look now like a girl I once read of in a German tale, who was punished for some offense against the wood-demon, by having her hair stiffened so as to make it stand up like a broom, and her clothes rent to tatters. Your frock, certainly, is whole; but your wig is like a magpie's nest, sticking out in all directions; and, though you are an Irish maiden, and as proud of it as any little bog-trotter of them all, still you needn't be *wild Irish*: there's nothing in a bristly head and torn frock to be proud of, missy, is there?"

I hung my head, for I was deeply humbled: not for many months could such a reproach have been justly applied to me; for I had learned under Miss Northey to be careful and neat, and now my first relapse into slovenliness was punished by the good-natured contempt of the only person who had addressed me in England with words and manner of kindly interest. I could have cried; but my pride burned up the tears; and, though they swelled my heart and choked my breath, I kept them down until I was alone. I was not sullen nor angry, but grieved and mortified; and I resolved never again to expose myself to the humiliation of being found fault with by a man, upon the subject of my dress.

CHAPTER XI.

UPON the morning of the funeral, my uncle and his wife arrived, having been summoned by my father, who met them in the hall, and conducted them into the drawing-room, where my mother, Sir Hugh, Philip, and I were sitting.

Mrs. William Vere's manner, always offensive, was now particularly so: she treated us all with an air of condescension that was quite ridiculous, and threw her arms round her son in thorough melo-dramatic style, calling him by the most absurd names of endearment. She apologized to Sir Hugh for not having arrived sooner, and hoped he had been made comfortable; talked of her husband's father as the "poor dear old man," and inquired if the body were in the west room, as she meant to make that her nursery. She then invited my father and mother to stay for a few days longer, observed that I was taller than ever, and, in short, patronized us all; evidently in the belief, that she was come to take possession of the place, *as wife of the heir.*

My uncle said very little; it was plain that he did not like the coolness of my father's manner, nor the ease with which he maintained his position. There was no change in my father's

behavior toward him; no deference, no yielding of authority; neither was there any assumption of it, but a quiet, self-possessed indifference, as if to be at Ingerdyne, and give orders there, was the most natural thing in the world; in fact, his usual and proper place. My uncle could find fault with nothing; for there was neither word nor tone upon which he could seize as a cause of quarrel.

His brother-in-law's manner was that of a well-bred man, receiving, *perforce*, a guest who, although his equal, was unpleasant and unwelcome to him. My father's courtesy was perfect; perhaps, if any thing, rather too much studied: it had a dash of contempt in it, also, but that was only apparent to those who knew him well; and although Major Vere might feel it, he certainly could not define or resent it.

The day was even hotter than those which had preceded it; not a breath of air mitigated the excessive sultriness; the parched and thirsty earth, burned-up turf, and drooping foliage, attested the scorching heat, and we all felt languid and oppressed. No one seemed to have any spirits or energy left but Mrs. William Vere; to her the fierce sun and tropical heat were delightful; it was the temperature of her country, the climate of her own Spain; and she was gay and cheerful, talking incessantly, as if we had all met to celebrate some festivity, instead of to consign a beloved and honored parent to the grave.

All at once, however, even she was silenced, for a solemn sound came booming over the earth, clanging through the trees: it was the tolling of the funeral knell. I started from my seat; the sound seemed to strike upon my heart, and chill me into ice. Philip grasped my hand, and pulled me back into my chair, whispering:

"Be still, Flory; look at your mother."

I did look; she sat like a marble statue, shedding no tear, uttering no word, but with her hands clasped upon her knee, and her eyes fixed. I would have gone to her, but my cousin held me back, saying, in a whisper:

"She's better alone, Flor."

People now began to move about: stealthy steps were heard on the staircase, and presently a low murmur in the room above, where lay the corpse. Then silence, broken by a sharp, ringing fall, as if some implement had been dropped. A bustle of feet succeeded; a door was gently opened, and a tramp as of men bearing a burthen crossed the landing. A hollow, jarring sound against the staircase-panel; it was the coffin which had struck against it. Then a whisper, and the bearers turned into the dining-room, and rested the body upon the trestles.

My mother gave a low cry, and sprang up to listen. Every thing was still; but in a minute we heard the harsh, grating-sound of wheels slowly traversing the gravel: it was the hearse, and the carriages of the neighboring gentry coming up to form into procession. The mourners were assembled in the library, where the usual refreshments were laid out; which, however needful they may be, are generally partaken of as a penance. Soon all was quiet, except the measured toll of the funeral knell, and the impatient stamp of the horses as the flies stung them. Presently, the room-door was softly opened by a mute official, who signed to my

father; and we saw that the hall was darkened by the grim, black vehicle, with its nodding plumes, which cast a gloomy shadow over the entrance.

In a few seconds my father returned, attired in the dismal trappings of a mourner, and then, one by one, the other gentlemen left the apartment, returning in the same melancholy costume. I could not shed a tear; a painful feeling of awe and sorrow bewildered me. I had never seen a funeral before, and the gloom, silence, and sadness of the scene terrified me. All was now ready; the mourners rose from their seats, in obedience to a signal from the undertaker; and, as he threw open the door, we saw the mutes give way, and a train of men, bearing the coffin, come forward. Then we heard a dull shove, and in another minute the plumed hearse drew off, and a mourning-coach took its place. At this sight, my poor mother's firmness forsook her, and she sobbed and cried pitiably. My father and Sir Hugh tried vainly to calm her agitation—she clung to them, as if, by preventing them from going, she could stop the funeral; and it was only after repeated remonstrances from the undertaker, who represented the indecorum of detaining the procession, that she would allow them to leave her. At last, with a heavy pace, as if the horses' feet were leaded, the cavalcade passed through the gates.

Philip was gone, and when my mother sent me away from her, that she might be quite alone, I was, indeed, miserable. I went into the nursery; it was empty: Helen and her maid were gone to Aston, lest the melancholy sight, for which I had entreated permission to remain, should have distressed her over-much. The old servants had congregated together, weeping and wondering; the younger ones were busy at their work, preparing for the return of the funeral guests, and talking in an under-tone of the changes that might take place in the house. There was no one who seemed to have leisure to talk to me. The windows were all thrown open, and gave the house a staring, flaunting appearance, unsympathizing and unhome-like.

To my sorrowful and gloomy spirits, the glare of the sun, and the bright hues of the flowers were detestable; they seemed to mock me. I wandered about from room to room, sitting down for a minute, then rising, from very weariness of my position; mechanically opening books, but not looking at them sufficiently to know what they contained; watching the various clocks, and listening for the returning carriages. At length I heard them, and went immediately into the library to meet Philip; who, with his father and mine, soon followed Sir Hugh into the house. They shook hands with the gentlemen who had returned with them, and then came to the library. There was an air of restraint and anxiety about them all, and when my mother and Mrs. William Vere joined them the feeling seemed to increase. The major and his wife talked together, standing by a great globe, which they twirled round and round in the eagerness of their conversation. My father looked out of the window, and Sir Hugh and my mother sat by a table, occupied with their own thoughts.

There was a short flight of oak-stairs from

the library into the dining-room, the door at the head of which stood open. Toward this, Philip beckoned me; and, glad to escape from the party, whose numbers already appeared too many for their own comfort, we retreated into the dining-room.

"Florence," asked the boy, eagerly, in a whisper, when we were alone, "where is my grandfather's will?"

"I don't know: what do you mean? What is a will?"

"Oh, you little simpleton! Well, has Mr. Spencer, the lawyer, been here lately?"

"Yes, often."

"Whom did he see?"

"Every body."

"Florence, you will put me in a passion: did he see my grandfather?"

"Yes. If he saw every body, he must have seen him."

"While he was ill?"

"Yes: but what can it matter to you, Philip? I want you to tell me about—"

"Flor! do you love me well enough to hold your tongue, and tell me the truth?" asked Philip, abruptly.

"Yes; if you will tell me how I can do both together."

"Don't be a fool, Flor. Listen to me. A will is a paper written by any body who has property, saying who is to have it after he is dead. Did my grandfather write such a will?"

"Yes."

"Ah! How do you know?"

"I saw him."

"You! you couldn't be a witness, surely. Who was there besides?"

"Mr. Spencer, my father and mother, the housekeeper, the butler, and a man who came with Mr. Spencer."

"How came you to be there?"

"I was on the landing, when Mr. Spencer opened the door and asked me to tell Mrs. Reynolds to come and bring the people he had spoken to her about. I did as he told me, and when she and the others went into the room, I went in with them."

"And what was done then?"

"Mr. Spencer said, 'I want you to witness this, and to see Mr. Vere sign it.' Then he said something to my grandfather, who was in bed; then to the other people, and then my grandfather wrote something upon a paper, which Mr. Spencer gave him, and afterward the others did the same."

"Who took the will? did you see?"

"No. I went away with Mrs. Reynolds."

"Your father and mother were there?"

"Yes, in the dressing-room."

"Then we've lost a fortune, and you've got one."

As he said this, a gig drove up the carriage-road, and as it passed the angle of the lawn, Philip exclaimed—

"Here's Mr. Spencer. Now for a hurricane."

Philip and I followed him into the library unnoticed. Major Vere was the first to speak.

"Good-day, Mr. Spencer. I understand that you have something to read to us; although I am at a loss to conjecture upon what subject, as I know that my father disposed of his property long ago."

"I am aware of it, sir: but during his last illness he thought fit to alter his previous intentions; and, by his directions, I prepared a document which I am ready to open in your presence and read to you."

"Alter his previous intentions! My father must have been unduly influenced, then. There were those about him—"

"If you allude to me, Major Vere," interrupted my father, "or to your sister, your insinuation is utterly groundless. If your father altered his intentions toward you, you have the reason for it nearer to yourself than either my wife or myself—"

"Do you mean me?" cried Mrs. William Vere, in her shrill voice. "If you dare—"

"Pray, pray be silent," said Sir Hugh, "and let Mr. Spencer proceed. Do not forget that your father is scarcely yet in his grave. It is surely unseemly to quarrel thus before his intentions are known."

"One word only, before the will is read, and I have done," said my father. "I know no more of the contents of that paper than you do, Sir Hugh. My father-in-law repeatedly expressed to my wife and myself, the extreme dislike of the conduct and manners of Mrs. William Vere (here that lady gave utterance to a fierce ejaculation; she was, however, silenced by Sir Hugh), and his displeasure at the disrespect shown to him by his son. He also expressed his determination not to encourage, or assist, in the expenditure of such large sums of money as were lavished by both upon foreign priests and their superstitions. He once told Alice that she better deserved the whole of his fortune than disguised Jesuits did a shilling; but we did all in our power to reconcile him to his son: whether we have been successful or not is about to be shown. What I now say is true, upon the honor of a soldier. And if you, Major Vere, doubt it, there is but one way in which the matter can be set at rest."

"I have great pleasure in bearing my testimony to the correctness of Captain Sackville's statement," said Mr. Spencer. "Mr. Vere spoke to me at various times of the disinterested affection of his daughter, and her honorable efforts to reconcile him to her brother. And he told me that, if it had not been for several anonymous letters which he had received since Mrs. Vere's death, impugning Mrs. Sackville's motives in remaining with him, and attacking her character most cruelly, those efforts might perhaps have been successful; but he was resolved to show that he was not to be influenced by such vile and contemptible expedients. A letter of this kind arrived upon the morning appointed for my receiving instructions respecting his will, and it decided him. He never informed me whom he suspected to be the authors of the scandalous letters; but to them most certainly, and not to any other influence, is to be attributed whatever change may have taken place in the disposition of his property."

A dead silence now reigned, during which we could hear the breaking of the seals and opening of the paper.

The will was read by Mr. Spencer. Ingerdyne, with all it contained, the land around it, and the stock upon it, with ten thousand pounds in money, were left to my mother. A small

property in Devonshire and a like sum of £10,000 were left to my uncle: with this difference—my mother's legacy was unfettered, being left to her without restriction, while her brother's was settled upon him and his children.

Ah! little did their father think, when he thus worded his bequest, that what he intended as a means of happiness to his daughter, would be the cause of her ruin; and that the children of the woman he despised, would live in affluence, derived from his angrily-meant entail, while hers would be in want.

A wrathful exclamation broke from my uncle's lips, when this part of the will was read, and he declared that he would listen no longer.

"It is a forgery!" he exclaimed, vehemently; "or, if the signature be genuine, it has been obtained under circumstances which will enable me to set it aside. My father was not in a fit state to make a will at the time when that document was extorted from him. Yes, sir, I repeat, extorted. I do not believe my father ever heard it read, or knew what it was about. You are all leagued together."

"Major Vere," said the lawyer, rising, "these are grave accusations. If they are true, I am unfit for your society; if not, you are unfit for mine. We can scarcely prolong this interview with propriety or satisfaction; therefore, my duty being now performed, I shall have the honor of wishing you good-morning."

"As you will, sir: as you will. This haste to break up the meeting is hardly what might be expected from a perfectly innocent man, such as you would fain have me suppose you to be."

The lawyer's color went and came. Himself a younger son of one of the oldest and proudest families in the county, he had always been received upon terms of perfect equality by every one in H—shire; and this gratuitous insult was equally unexpected and unpardonable. Even my haughty and reserved grandfather had always treated Mr. Spencer as a man equally well-born with himself; and to meet this ill-bred rudeness from his son, was almost more than the lawyer could bear. He put down the papers, and then took them up again, as if indignation contended with his better judgment. The last prevailed, however, when Sir Hugh interposed with, "Pray, resume your seat, Mr. Spencer; the angry words of a disappointed man should not be heeded."

"If there is any thing further to read, Mr. Spencer, pray, be so good as to do so at once; for this is a very painful business, and I am anxious to retire," said my mother.

"Absurd!" retorted Major Vere, "as if those who planned, perhaps wrote the will, had forgotten its contents."

My mother made no reply; and I could see that my father averted his face, and set his teeth hard, as if to constrain himself from speaking.

The lawyer proceeded. Some unimportant legacies were left to the old servants, and rings to friends; at last he read:

"And I also direct that if either of my children dispute this my will, or in any shape throw obstacles in the way of its administration, then the whole and entire of the legacies, or other benefits accruing to him or her from it, shall be forfeited, and go to the unoffending party; my object in this being to prevent any litigation or quarrels respecting the disposition of my property."

"What's dat? Read dat again," cried Mrs. William Vere, sharply.

"Very cleverly contrived," said the major, when his wife had been obeyed, "but useless. If part of the will be a forgery, so is it all; and that clause will no more prevent my disputing it, and discovering the guilty, than if no such words existed. Really, Mrs. Sackville, it was, after all, a very shallow contrivance. I wonder you did not hit upon something not quite so transparent."

"Major Vere," interposed my father, "I hope you will, for all our sakes, endeavor to control yourself: such language is not to be borne. Do not drive me beyond my powers of forbearance. They are not great, and I can not answer for myself much longer."

"Pray, do not let me be any restraint upon you, Captain Sackville: though the discipline might be wholesome, were it only for its novelty," retorted Major Vere, in a sneering tone.

"Gerald!" cried my mother, imploringly, as her husband rose furiously from his chair. But she could not prevent my father from exclaiming:

"I will bear it no longer! For the sake of the good old man whose body is scarcely yet cold in his grave, I have borne more already than I ever thought to do from any human being: but there is a limit to endurance; and I tell you frankly, Major Vere, that as, but for the memory of your dead father, I would ere this have called you to account for the calumnies you have uttered, so now even that shield shall serve you no longer: from this moment we stand as those indifferent to each other, and I will have from you, for any future insult, satisfaction as ample as I would demand from a stranger."

As he spoke, my uncle rose, too, and retorted in a harsh, satirical voice:

"Far be it from me to balk your fancy, Captain Sackville. Having cared so affectionately for my peace, it is but natural that you should extend your protection to my person also. I am ready at your own time."

"Shame! shame! young men!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, silencing my father's passionate reply. "How dare you indulge your angry passions thus in the house of the dead? William Vere, in the name of him who is gone, I command your silence. Captain Sackville, for the sake of one who forgave you much, bear with his son, and be silent."

"But such infamous charges, sir! The accusation of having influenced Mr. Vere, to the injury of his son and for my own advantage—how am I to endure this calmly?" asked my father, impetuously.

"Do not compel me to put a question where I have no doubt. If you are innocent, the passionate words of an angry man can not prove you guilty. If you are guilty, neither his violence nor your own denial can prove you innocent."

"I can assure—" began Mr. Spencer.

"Sir, you may be a very good lawyer—I dare say you are—and obedient as a spaniel to your employers; take that guinea, therefore, and consider yourself retained by me to hold your tongue," thundered my uncle, throwing a coin upon the table.

At a moment all was confusion. Voices rose

above each other, in a din of conflicting exclamation, so that nothing could be distinguished; till the clear mellow tones of the lawyer at last made themselves heard above the clamor, as he said:

"For this gross insult, by far more degrading to the man who offered it than to me who have received it, I believe that I should be entitled to claim what people miscall satisfaction; but from a madman—one so lost to all sense of common decency as to brawl in the house from which his father's corpse has not been one hour carried—who dares to make charges which no honest man would make, unless he could support them by indisputable evidence—I can ask nothing; because it is out of the power of such a one to give me satisfaction. The man who degrades himself below the rank of a gentleman is no longer one; and I tell you, Major Vere, that I would as soon think of calling out your groom as you."

"Insufferable insolence!" cried the major. "Call me out! You must be mad to dream of such a thing. You have strangely forgotten our relative positions."

"One is very apt to do so in all cases of lunacy, when the patient has been tolerably quiet," retorted Mr. Spencer, coolly.

"Scoundrel!" exclaimed my uncle, furiously, "you have been well paid for this; but I'll—" and my uncle snatched a riding whip from behind him, and shook it at Mr. Spencer.

"Do not oblige me to think you a coward, Major Vere," said the lawyer, contemptuously. "I have told you that I will not be provoked into giving or taking what is called satisfaction from you; therefore, this is mere braggart insolence."

At this critical moment there was a loud rap at the library door, and a servant entered with a message to my father from Mr. Comberton, of Aston, who had called to ask permission to keep Helen for a few days longer.

How thankful I felt: I had never before been so grateful for an interruption.

"Ask Mr. Comberton to come here," said my mother, quickly; catching eagerly at the means of breaking up this terrible meeting. "Mr. Comberton is an old friend; his presence is opportune."

"Come with me, Flory; come away," said Philip, as the welcome visitor entered; "I am hot and savage: come along," and he dragged rather than led me into the shrubbery, along which he walked at a furious pace, kicking the pebbles before him as he went. At last he became sufficiently calm to speak.

"What a horrible thing it is, Flor., to be ashamed of one's father and mother! I feel as if I were going mad: I believe I could kill any thing that came in my way," and as he spoke he took off his cap and threw it violently on the ground. "I am so hot, my blood boils all over me. People don't know what they say when they talk of their blood boiling. I've said so hundreds of times, but I never felt it till now. It's rushing up into my head like fire. Flor., do I look mad?"

He pushed me a few steps back, and stood before me. His face was flushed scarlet to the very roots of his hair; his eyes sparkled and flashed, looking as large again as usual. His tall, lithe figure trembled; not from weakness, but from excess of emotion, and the veins stood

out upon his brow and throat like blue cords. I had never seen any body who was mad, but certainly every idea I could have formed of madness was realized in Philip.

"What a blessing it would be if I should die, Flor," he said, throwing himself from me with a kind of jerk. "I shall do something dreadful one of these days, I know I shall: I've too much Spanish blood in me to be quiet; and since one can't get rid of one's father and mother, I shall be driven to try if I can't get rid of myself. I wouldn't care if they had tempers and passions like the very Furies; but this plotting, sneering, calculating, cunning life is more than I can bear—more than I will bear. Flor., if I were a man I know what I'd do—I'd change my name, marry you, and go to America: better to live in the woods, like a savage, than dread the sound of one's name here."

I had not a very definite idea of what marrying me meant: whether it was any thing that I could avoid, or a horrible misfortune which might fall upon me unawares; so I did not reply to Philip's doubtful *intentions* in my behalf, but puzzled along in silence by his side. Indeed, there was no necessity for me to talk, or even to reply, since my companion answered his own questions, and never waited a moment for the opinions for which he asked me.

"Well, there's one good thing in this will, at any rate," said he; "now my father has lost Ingerdyne, he won't be so well off as he expected, and will be glad to let me stay with Sir Hugh. I wish he'd let me take my godfather's name: such things are done, you know. Better be any thing than a Vere now, since we've fallen so low that an attorney dares call my father fool and coward. Flor., if I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget this day."

That evening, after a short interview with Sir Hugh, Major and Mrs. Vere left Ingerdyne. Every one breathed more freely when their carriage wheels could be heard no longer, and we felt, by the peacefulness of the house, that they were fairly gone.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR two months after this, Sir Hugh and Philip remained with us at Ingerdyne: during which time I became a great favorite with the old gentleman, and used to accompany him in his rides every morning. At home he made me read to him for two hours daily, and thus I acquired that clear and distinct enunciation, and just emphasis, which proved of much value to me afterward. He it was who first reconciled me to my voice and accent, both of which I had been so accustomed to hear derided; for he used to say that to no one in the house did he listen with half the pleasure that he did to me, and this was the reason why he took so much pains to make me articulate distinctly, and pronounce properly. Years after, when he was dead, and all things were changed, I found the benefit of this training, and to this day the only accomplishment of which I am proud is this one, which I owe to Sir Hugh.

Now that we lived together, Philip and I could not agree at all. Our pride, in which we were so much alike, was always in each other's way. Poets love to expatiate on the happiness result-

ing from the union of kindred minds; but the tempers and dispositions which agree best together, are certainly *not* those which are most similar. Philip patronized me, as boys always do girls; and I did not feel at all inclined to submit to it. He found out how I hated to be quizzed for my brogue, and whenever I was in a pet, he used to delight in "*soothing*" me, as he called it; speaking the most outrageous and absurd imitation of Irish he could think of. No one battled for me against others so energetically as he did; no one delighted so much in hearing my praise from Sir Hugh; but he seemed to fancy that gave him a right over me—made me, in a certain sort, his own; and that, therefore, he was at liberty to tease me as he liked. He looked upon me as a kind of human cockchafer, to be tormented at his pleasure.

Of course, I rebelled against all this wanton tyranny; and many ridiculous things did I say and do in consequence. Purely to annoy him, I would often, even in spite of my own convictions, take the part of others against him. Not in their presence, though, only when we were alone, and then in the coolest language and manner I could freeze myself into; for, child as I was, I had discovered the great secret, that nothing enrages an angry man so much, as to be treated with cool indifference.

Another cause of quarrel was Philip's *exigence*. He wanted to be adored, and I felt no inclination to worship him. One day, after we had been out with Sir Hugh, and had ridden a race on the moors near Aston, which Philip had won, he came to me as I sat on the dear old box-tree, and throwing himself on the ground, asked—

"Flor., how came you to let me beat you to-day? Sancho (so was my horse called) could have passed me, I think, if you would have let him."

"No, he couldn't," I answered. "I tried hard to pass you, for I had no fancy to be beaten by you, I can tell you."

"Ah, Flor.! that's what I complain of: if you loved me half as much as I love you, you would like me to be first always."

"Well then, I don't, I suppose," rejoined I, carelessly.

"You ought, then, Flor.: it's shameful that you do not; it's ungrateful, and that's what I thought you prided yourself upon never being."

"Ungrateful, indeed! What have I to be grateful to you for, Philip? I'm sure I don't know."

Now this was a fib; for I did know very well; and I should have been ready enough to give him my gratitude to any reasonable amount, but I did not choose that it should be claimed and exacted as a debt. Girls are certainly little women; and when my cousin looked at me with a face of angry astonishment, I broke out into a saucy laugh, precisely as a young lady of eighteen might have done.

"You torment me to death, Florence! I won't bear it."

"Don't then: go away," and I laughed again. "I can spare you."

"You ungrateful little thing; I'm a fool to care about you. You've no more heart than this tree."

"Pretty well, if I've half as much, Phil.," I retorted, in a tone of banter.

"Ah, Irish!" he said with a mocking sneer, "you think that is wit. But I don't care; you *shall* love me. There's nobody else fit for you to love; if there were, I'd shoot him: so leave off talking nonsense, and be a good little thing."

"I shall love whom I please, and hate whom I please," said I, haughtily: "and I like Fred. Comberton a thousand times better than I ever loved you; he's so quiet and well behaved."

Now be it known that this Fred. Comberton was a perfect horror of mine; he was tall and thin, with a white face, long light eyelashes, and hair like drab fringe, had a voice like that of an invalid peacock, and a figure about as graceful as a crane's. I detested him; but I could have got up an extempore affection for Caliban just then, for the pleasure of mortifying Philip's importance.

"You do, do you, Miss Florence? I'll thrash the little grasshopper within an inch of his life, if he dares to come here, that's all; so he had better look out, I can tell you," retorted Philip, angrily, as he rushed away.

These *scrimmages* (pardon, English reader, this expressive Irish term, for its significance) occurring, as they did, every day in some shape or other, formed the chief incidents of my life while Sir Hugh and Philip remained with us. Before winter set in, however, they went away. My father accompanied them as far as London, where he staid until after Christmas.

My existence now became a very tranquil and monotonous one. I learned my lessons by heart, and repeated them to the prim governess (not dear Miss Northey) who presided over us, three hours daily; and who looked, poor thing! as if she had just come out of a mummy pit. I rode Sancho as long as I liked, and I never touched a needle if I could by any possibility avoid it. Twice a week we had a dancing mistress, and every Monday a drawing and French master. The two first accomplishments I delighted in, the last I never achieved. I could not learn languages. Oh! the weary hours poor Monsieur de L'Orme wasted in trying to teach me how to conjugate *être*, and how to place those horrid little articles; mysteries which I never could comprehend.

I missed my dear kind friend Miss Northey more than ever. How different were my lessons to me now! Do as I would, take all the care I could, still I was never praised; nor scolded, except with a kind of querulous growl. Miss Soverby seemed to have outlived emotion of every kind; I don't think I ever saw her smile, and I'm sure that I never saw her weep. She did not even frown as other people do, but she contracted her whole face, giving one the idea of a person who had swallowed a glass of vinegar and wished to conceal the fact. Oh! she was a wearisome woman that Miss Alicia Soverby.

One dreary part of my education was to learn music from her, and as this was another accomplishment which I had no wish to acquire—I mean as to the *learning* it; for beyond all other things, except riding, I loved to listen to it; the task of studying it with her was horrible. Detesting bad music, I could not bear to hear my own jangle; and no wonder that her mechanical "one, two, three, and four; one, two-o-o, three, four," irritated me, so as to deprive me of

the power of comprehension, and left me, after many years' enforced labor, a most wretched performer. One thing, however, this experience taught me, never to persecute a child into following any pursuit for which it has a real incapacity or rooted aversion.

During our first winter at Ingerdyne I had a severe billious fever, and for some weeks my life was despaired of. Then shone out the beauty of a mother's love; whenever I opened my eyes, at whatever time, mine was by my bedside. When I was at the worst, and before the delirium came on, she was there; and afterward when it was gone and I became rational again, knowing those about me, there she was still; I never remember opening my eyes and finding her away. A kind of dreamy idea that she must be very tired and want rest used to come across my mind; but I was too weak to shape my thoughts into words, and so, during the whole of the time I was in danger, my mother kept watch by my bed. Her voice, so sweet and clear, ringing like musical bells, answered every want; and her soft, cool, white hands, administered my food and medicine. The room was kept so quiet, the windows so pleasantly shaded, the fire so noiselessly replenished, that I had nothing to wish for, or to deprecate.

When I was getting better, I used to lie still in my bed, too weak to talk, watching the quiet movements of my mother. There was never any bustle or confusion; every thing that was likely to be wanted was placed upon one tray, every thing that had been used upon another. There was no collecting of jingling glasses and clattering spoons, no rattling of basins and vials, for all were softly placed upon a thick-covered tray, and noiselessly removed at stated times, by a servant, whose business it was to replace them. My sleep was never disturbed by any intrusion, nor was the door ever even tried at such times, for it was my mother's custom always to pass a long white feather through the key-hole, which intimated to those without that no visitors could be admitted; and when I awoke she rang the bell three times, to announce to all persons whom it might concern, that the restriction was removed, and that those who had business might enter. Certainly my mother was the tenderest and best of nurses; I have never seen her equal, either for patience, gentleness, or endurance of fatigue.

For me, this illness was a most blessed event; it changed all my feelings toward this dear parent, and left upon my heart through life a holy and beautiful memory of her kindness, a store of gratitude, which never failed. Now, too, came upon me an insatiable thirst for reading; which has never since left me entirely. Any books I could get at, however strange or stupid, all were eagerly devoured; but I especially loved fairy tales; no one can ever know how truly I believed in them. Titania and Oberon were to me quite as real as grim King Rufus, or that crabbed Queen Bess; and a thousand times more agreeable. All my early lore, Old Cicely's tales, and every legend I had ever heard, returned upon my memory as I read, and I often wished (oh, how earnestly!) that those fairy patrons, whose good-will I had been told was secured for me at my birth, by the gift of the green ribbon, would teach me the mysterious words by which I might

call them to me, and become sensible of their presence.

From the moat side, and spreading far across, grew multitudes of beautiful water-lilies, and to my fancy there was not one but was the home of some bright and lovely fay; some tiny Undine. Often as the wind swept the waters, and made the flowers rock and tremble, and hide their heads beneath the stream, I have fancied that the graceful children of the floods, the sweet water-spirits, were at play; and that the splashing sound and rush of the little waves were the echoes of their laughter. Even now that I am world-worn, I never stand beside the deep quiet waters of a lake or river but my old thoughts come back, and I catch myself wondering, as in those childish days, what the fairies are doing. I am not ashamed of this, nor would I check these fancies if I could; because I do not think that I am on this account one atom less sensible of the realities of life, and the duty of prompt and energetic action. The green nook in my memory where these fancies nestle, is one I love to peep into; although it may be folly, it is an innocent one at least, and until I find that it makes me less useful and practical than I ought to be, I shall cherish and indulge it.

When I became well enough to walk, spring had burst forth in all its fresh young beauty. How lovely did the earth look to me then! Merely to live seemed a privilege; the very power to breathe, and use one's senses was a joy—all the sweet scents, and sights, and sounds which come with the "gay young spring" delighted me as they never had before; the old hawthorns powdered with blossoms, the laburnums with their drooping tresses of gold, the snowy globes of the Guelder-rose and the delicate bloom of the lilac, making the fresh air redolent with fragrance, filled me with ecstasy. Spring has ever since been a joyous season to me; who can be sad in spring?

From this time until I was fourteen, very little, if any, change took place in our way of living. My father was almost always absent from home, and when he returned, talked of Doncaster, Newmarket, Epsom, Ascot, and Tattersall's, as if his whole interest in existence was centred in them. When he came to Ingerdyne he generally brought with him men whose ideas and pursuits were like his own; and during the hunting and shooting seasons, the house was full of sportsmen, and the stables of their grooms and horses.

My mother never appeared to enter into her husband's pleasures or pursuits. Nothing that he did seemed to interest her; though I often wished it otherwise; for then, perhaps, the evil which ere long befell us might have been averted. It must be vexatious and injurious to a man to see his wife indifferent to him and his doings; and no one that I ever knew accomplished this so thoroughly as my mother. It was unmistakable; the most careless husband could not deceive himself in the matter; there was no affectation, no *seeming*; but there was the thing itself. How she blinded herself to the enormous expenses into which my father was now running, *I can not tell; or how she reconciled it to herself not to interfere, for her own and our sakes, I do not know; but certainly things went on in a most reckless manner.*

When I was between fifteen and sixteen, as Helen and I were studying our lessons one summer morning, reclining, meantime, very luxuriously upon the grass under the trees, we were aroused by the sight of a carriage, drawn by four reeking horses, which was dashing up to the house. Before it had well stopped, my father, opening the door himself, jumped out and ran into the hall, followed by two gentlemen. He was not expected, and we were full of wonder, conjecturing all sorts of reasons for his visit. At length our surmises were interrupted by meeting the party in the shrubbery, as we were returning to the house. I was very tall; as tall then, indeed, as I ever afterward became, and the strangers, taking me, I suppose, for a much older person than I was, lifted their hats.

"These are my children," said my father, holding out his hands to us. "Well, girls, how are you both? Maudesley, you must get up a friendship with Florence, she will make a capital aid-de-camp."

"I shall only be too happy," said the gentleman he addressed. "If Miss Sackville will condescend to work for me, I shall consider myself a conqueror from the hour she promises me her assistance."

I opened my eyes with amazement, for I happened to be in a particularly literal mood that morning, and looked upon compliments as monstrous absurdities. I had been puzzling over a French exercise, and was as dull as the lesson; and when in these moods I was particularly disagreeable.

"Don't stare so, Flory!" said my father, laughing; "Mr. Maudesley is not going to eat you, or propose an elopement; he only wants you to ride about the country here with him, as you used to do with me in Galway."

"What for, papa?" asked Helen.

"An election, my dear; a contested election. This wise and aged man wishes to make laws, to protect young and innocent people like you and me."

Helen laughed as she looked at the venerable candidate. Mr. Maudesley was about thirty, with the beauty of an Adonis, the manners of a prince, and the heart of a *roué*; which last, providentially, looked out of his eyes in such an unmistakable way, that none but those blindest beetles of any—people who *won't* see—could be deceived by him.

"Well, lady fair!" said he, smiling, "and what has your scrutiny discovered? Am I too old and infirm to be presented to the free and independent electors?"

Helen laughed again, and tossed her golden hair back from her merry face.

"You won't vote against me, I see; I shall put down Miss Helen Sackville for a plumper. But you, Miss Sackville," and he turned to me, "look very doubtful. Surely you won't go over to the enemy. That slight, youthful fox-hunter of eighteen stone can't have made a conquest already, and stolen your vote from me."

There was the slightest possible tinge of ridicule in his voice as he spoke; but my quick ear instantly detected it, and I replied, with a childish pettishness for which I was angry at myself even as I spoke,

"Girls have no votes, sir, and you know that very well: you are only laughing at us."

A loud laugh burst from the whole party at this absurd speech.

"Why, Flory," said my father, "I did not think you were such a baby as to show airs and graces. If you've sense enough to see when you're quizzed, you should have wit enough to keep the knowledge to yourself."

"Never mind me, Miss Sackville," exclaimed Mr. Maudesley, good-humoredly, seeing the state of annoyance I was in, and that, in spite of my dignity, I was ready to cry; "when I know me better, you will find that I am not worth being angry with. My joke at the inn brewer was only a chance shot; I really had no idea you were interested in his welfare: so, come, and let us make peace, and perhaps, as we walk, you will 'insease' me with the tactics of the county."

This unlucky speech affronted me ten times more: it was not only treating me like a baby, but mocking my Irish. How I abominated this well-looking candidate!

"Come with us, Flory, and tell me all that has happened since I left you; how often every body has called, and how every body has behaved," said my father, stopping me in the retreat I had commenced. "First and foremost, did you know we were to have an election?"

"No, papa."

"That's well; then we have taken the field first, and that's some hundreds of votes in our favor! Has Mr. Comberton been here lately?"

"Yes, last week."

"Alone? Did he call to see me?"

"Yes: and when he found you were not at home, he asked me if I had any message to send to you, for he was going to write."

"What day was that?"

"Saturday, I think—yes, it was Saturday."

"No post to London: to-day's Monday, and we left town before the letters were delivered. That accounts for my not having heard from him. That's lucky."

"Who is this you are speaking of, and what matters his letter?"

"It's Fred. Comberton, our adversary, as I believe; and of course he wrote to secure my interest. If I had received his letter, it would have been difficult to avoid committing myself without betraying our intentions prematurely; now we have the whole day before us."

"Yes, and we must make the most of it; it's now only ten o'clock; so we might do eight hours good work before dinner."

In the energy of his voice, and activity of his determination, Mr. Maudesley lost the tone which had so annoyed me: I felt pleased, and, I suppose, looked so, for he laughed, and said,

"Oh, we shall be friends yet, I see, Miss Sackville."

"Never fear; tell her you are but just come from Ireland, and she'll forgive any thing to a Paddy. Flory is an out-and-out patriot," said my father.

My mother now joined us, for this news was stirring, and we walked up and down the shrubbery, debating upon the steps immediately necessary, in order to commence the contest.

"Of all the men in the county," said my father, "Comberton is the most dangerous opponent, in case of a popular man starting on the real interest; for his family is about the old-

est in the shire, and his interest is immense. Still, if Sir James Ingram and Mr. Laslett are the only men brought forward on the other side, Comberton and you are pretty safe to carry all before you. But my fear is that Lord Redfern will propose his son, who is one of the county pets; and then our chance would be bad, for we should have to fight every inch of ground."

"So much the better: nothing like doing battle for one's rights, is there, Miss Sackville. A fair field and a bold fight, is a maxim of war as old as Queen Boadicea."

As he spoke we turned a corner in the shrubbery, and came suddenly upon the very man of whom we had been just speaking;

"*Diablo!*" exclaimed my father, in a low voice, to Mr. Maudesley; "here's the very man himself. Now to take the bull by the horns;" and he walked quickly forward to meet his visitor, saying, gayly, "The top o' the mornin' to ye, Mr. Comberton! An' what philanderin' brings yer honor this way so arly? Sure it's too late for the May-fly, seein' now that it's July."

"I hope not, Sackville, for you are a fish I am most anxious to catch."

"Well and that's strange now, for I'd just made up my mind to hook you."

"For a good dinner after the races? I'll come, with all the pleasure in life."

"No; I shall expect you to give us a dinner first, on the occasion—but I forgot to introduce you. Mr. Comberton, this is Mr. Thomas Maudesley, of whom all the world has heard. He stands modestly before you to solicit the honor of your vote and interest for the county of H——. Our cards are not out yet, seeing that we only left town this morning; but, as near as I can recollect, those are the words of his petition."

Mr. Comberton bowed.

"Then I have the honor of saluting my rival; for I am here upon the same errand."

"Canvassing! for whom?"

"Myself. I have received a requisition from about a thousand electors to offer myself for the suffrages of the county; I have consented, and am now upon my canvass."

"The writ is not down yet?"

"No; but it will be next week; and, as I hear George Redfern intends to take the field, I want to see if I have a reasonable chance, before I stand a contest. You, of course, sir," turning to Mr. Maudesley, "are upon the Tory side?"

"Most decidedly."

"I'm sorry for it, because I do not like to oppose the friend of Mr. Vere's son-in-law; but if I once undertake a thing, I am like a mastiff, never relinquish my hold, till I am actually beaten off. If I am proposed on the hustings, I shall poll while a vote remains to be given."

"Fairly said. Well, each of us now knows his opponent, and that's something gained. We shall not be tilting in the dark. You intend to stick by your post; so do I. I never was beaten in any thing I heartily tried for yet, except—no matter what; and I promise the free and independent electors of this right royal shire, I won't begin to show the white feather now," said Mr. Maudesley, gayly.

"How unfortunate that you should both have

decided upon representing the very same place!" said my mother, with a laugh.

"Not at all; it will add to the excitement: nothing like beating an intimate friend. We shall speak and look daggers at each other for the next week or two; but till then we may venture to be civil, I think: eh, Comberton? So come in and take some breakfast, or luncheon, whichever you like to call it, and let us each drink success to our own cause in a bottle of claret," observed my father.

Oh, what an exciting, bustling time succeeded this conversation—canvassing, meetings, committees, dinners, occupied every day. Not an hour was lost, nor a chance overlooked. And, stranger though he was in the county, Mr. Maudesley's fascinating manner and well-known name speedily made him a favorite. But the Redfern interest was immense, and many who would not vote for the Whig, yet, from love to his family, or some old tie of friendship, remained neutral; while many undecided men, who would at the last moment have gone with us rather than with Sir James or Mr. Laslett, now declared for George Redfern: and many milk-and-water Tories also, who disliked Mr. Comberton, knew nothing of Mr. Maudesley, and hated the Radicals, were easily won over for the moderate and popular Whig candidate. The votes were terribly divided.

H— is a Tory county, and if Mr. Redfern had not started, both the Tories would certainly have been returned; but now, the interest being split into three parts, the Liberals were creeping in: one of their men might wriggle into the vacant seat, owing to the dissensions among us; for the Whigs held hard and fast by each other, and we were dividing our interest among three. It was really an anxious time; and, to add to our perplexity, one fine morning, an address to the electors was posted every where, announcing that Mr. Laslett had retired, and calling upon his friends to support the baronet.

Every day, and all day long, Mr. Maudesley was riding and speechifying: it was really wonderful how he got over so much ground and so many voters in the time. In the morning he would be canvassing at A., and two hours after, he would be tying blue and red sashes round the thick waists of Farmer B.'s children twenty miles off. Yet after all this fatigue he seemed as fresh and full of spirits at dinner, when it was his business to fascinate landlords and heiresses, as if he had only walked from the library to his dressing-room. This indomitable energy was one great secret of his popularity. Men like to see another "alive," as their phrase is; they think, and very justly too, that drones and idlers are mostly noodles, while vigorous action generally denotes resolution of purpose.

Another thing greatly in his favor was, that he was a bachelor. Let nobody be offended at this truth. Half the men who get on in professions or trades, who succeed in diplomacy or in parliament, owe their success to the very fact of being without a wife. While a man is single, every father, mother, and daughter has an interest in his prosperity; for how do they know but, *some day or other, they may share it*; his sins are "errors," for it wouldn't do to abuse your own possible son-in-law; but only let the fascinating creature take unto himself a wife, and

woe to him then, for his popularity is gone. Every body's voice is against him, for he has committed a two-fold offense: he has not only cheated an indefinite number of eligible young ladies out of a settlement for life, but he has cast a slur upon them all, by preferring before them one whom they of course consider a most unworthy rival. If a man wishes to get on in the world, and can't marry an heiress, let him by all means remain single.

And this Mr. Maudesley, as a man of the world, well knew; therefore he eschewed matrimony as carefully as he would have avoided a rattlesnake. His father was only son of a gouty peer, who had attained the respectable age of eighty-seven; and, as the honorable George himself inherited the family constitution, and was a confirmed invalid, there was scarcely any thing worth naming between the candidate for H— and the Barony.

Few people, except the Jews and lawyers, knew how profusely the heir had distributed *post obits*, and, by consequence, how small would be the income to which he would succeed with the title of Lord Fanshawe. And only those in the secret guessed that it was rather to escape the zealous attentions of Messrs. Levi (who would have been delighted to provide for his safety in their secluded establishment in Cursitor-street), than to obtain the honor of a seat in Parliament, that Tom Maudesley, as he was familiarly called, canvassed the electors of H—. And therefore it was, that—all these secrets being well kept, and the one delightful fact of his bachelorhood fully established—all the marriageable young ladies and anxious mammas of our innocent shire, listened to the flatteries and heroics to the Tory candidate with such hopeful and fluttering hearts.

Why will girls look to marriage as the chief aim and end of their existence, and regarding every man as a possible husband, make themselves contemptible, and despised accordingly? And why will managing mothers scheme and manœuvre, and lie awake at nights planning matches for their daughters; as if to marry them well was their first duty, and to throw off the care of them upon the shoulders of the first victim who can be ensnared, their main object in life? Surely this is a grand mistake. A mother never can shake off her child, and the more the cares of the daughter are increased, the heavier become those of her parent; no one having yet, I believe, started the insane theory, that marriage is a cure for the evils of life: indeed, the mother who marries her daughter to get rid of her troubles, is much in the condition of the man who gave a promissory note for a debt, and then rubbed his hands, with a smile of congratulation, saying, "Well, thank God, that's paid."

Ah! if girls would but be convinced that marriage is a state which *may* produce happiness to them; a responsibility with which God *may* see fit to try them: a very doubtful good indeed, and a very certain addition to their cares and responsibility, instead of merely the means of acquiring an establishment, unlimited credit at their milliner's, and a license to be independent: we might hope to see brighter characters and holier homes than we can ever expect to do while the present system exists. But until we men learn to look upon marriage in the hum

religious light in which God intended them to regard it, they will never take the honorable place which He designed them to fill, nor be fitted to play the noble part allotted to them by Christ's religion.

Certainly the demoiselles of H— had not learned this necessary lesson; for if ever a man was smiled at, dressed at, talked at, and sighed at, Mr. Maudesley was the individual. And he managed admirably: every body thought herself the adored, while he never said one word, or looked one glance, upon which the most desperate papa could find a right to request him to explain this intentions. Without doubt, Tom Maudesley thoroughly deserved my father's usual panegyric—he certainly was in all things a most perfectly accomplished man of the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

At last the writ came down, and the good people of H—shire were at liberty to choose a new member to represent their interests in the Lower House. Every body had worked as hard as those ill-paid victims in our own times—railway directors—and yet every body cried out now, “we must lose no time,” “we must not let the grass grow under our feet,” and sundry other similar resolves, implying undeserved self-reproach for past idleness. The poll was fixed for the Thursday and Friday of the ensuing week, and the candidates were to be proposed on the Monday.

On Sunday we all walked to church, doing the amiable with all our might; Mr. Maudesley smiling and bowing until his neck ached. The little urchins along the road and church-yard, who made us the most primitive courtesies and bows, must have thought the world was suddenly gone benevolently mad; such presents of new silver sixpences, such sweet names, bland smiles, and caresses were showered upon them. We didn't know, of course, who they were: they might be scions of independent Tory freeholders, or they might be promising young Radicals; but it would not have done to risk offending a voter or even a voter's cat; so we smiled and nodded away most condescendingly.

Just under our pew at church, was a bench, upon which sat all the old poor-house women of the parish. No one belonging to Ingerdyne had ever, as far as I knew, taken the least notice of these poor old souls before; but now they became suddenly invested with a deep and intense interest to us all. The Whigs had said that we, the Tories, were all proud, aristocratic, and illiberal; careless of the poor, and reckless of their feelings: it was a vile calumny, and now an opportunity was about to offer itself by which its falsehood would be proved.

It was a very hot day, and one of the old women—just as if it had happened on purpose—fainted during the service; in a moment Mr. Maudesley glided out of our pew, lifted the old lady up quite tenderly, and mistaking the way to the vestry, which was close at hand (the Whigs said that he did it designedly), carried her down the aisle, to the open door; through which he passed into the porch, and placing her upon the seat, dispatched a wondering urchin for some water, and then commenced fanning her with

her bonnet, which he had gently removed to give her air.

In a few seconds half the congregation (all the young ladies in particular) had left their pews to assist Mr. Maudesley, and fuss about an old woman of whom they had hitherto known, and even now cared, nothing. The interesting sufferer soon revived, and Mr. Maudesley supported her carefully up the aisle, and with the respectful tenderness of a son handed her into our well-cushioned pew, where my mother relinquished her own corner for the old dame's comfort.

The whole thing struck me as so irresistibly ludicrous, that I could scarcely refrain from laughing; while the hero of the day sat or stood demurely repeating the responses, or attending to the clergyman, as if he had no thoughts or interest beyond the sacred duty he had come there to perform. Meanwhile, our supporters and well-wishers were in a fever of delight: their smiles and glances to each other were eloquence itself.

It would be a curious fact if one could ascertain how often during that service, the people looked at Mr. Maudesley, instead of at the reverend Dr. York. The young ladies gazed at the handsome candidate through their ringlets, with something of the adoration we can fancy Kathleen felt for the unfeeling saint who threw her into the lake. He might have married whoever he liked that day; even the haughty Ethel Redfern, sister to our antagonist, who had hitherto looked so scornfully indifferent, crimsoned consciously as I caught her eye glancing furtively for about the twentieth time at her brother's fascinating rival. Very differently, however, looked our male opponents; they winked to each other, shrugged their shoulders, curled their lips, and in every quiet way possible, demonstrated their belief that the entire thing was humbug. However, as we were quite ten to one there, we could well afford to pity them, and retorted with triumphant and contemptuous smiles.

When service was over, Mr. Maudesley, feeling sure that the church-yard would be thronged, however long he delayed his departure, begged my mother to remain in the pew until nearly every one had left the church. She consented, and when he thought that he could effect an exit in the most modest-looking manner, feigning a belief that every one must have departed, he walked slowly down the empty church, supporting old Betty Haines on one side, while my mother held her other arm; my father and the rest of the party following a few steps behind. When we reached the porch, we found, as the shrewd politician had expected, most of the congregation standing about in groups. He affected to look vexed, as if this was a publicity he had wished to avoid; but, calling up a smile, he said something encouraging to Betty, and with the most gracious bows, won his way to the little gate, where, to my astonishment, I saw his carriage was standing. With the utmost gentleness he lifted old Betty into it, pressed something into her hand, closed the door—having first entreated farmer Jones (of whose vote he was doubtful) to permit his kind and charming daughter Mary to accompany the old woman home—and then, giving some very impressive orders to his servant, drew back to allow the chariot to pass.

"Pray forgive me," said he, turning to my mother with a smile, and loud enough for all the people round to hear; "but that poor creature is so like my old nurse, that I forgot every thing else in my anxiety for her. I'm afraid she's very weak: those workhouses must be looked after." And with a bow of well-feigned embarrassment to the people, he led the way out of the church-yard.

"Ay, sir, so I says," exclaimed farmer Jones, who had been captivated by the compliment paid to his daughter's discretion and beauty. "So I says—they poor creturs be starved, while we pays rates eno' for 'em to live like gentlefolks a'most. It's unbearable, and wants looking arter."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Jones: but we want old, practical men, you know, to tackle things like this—men who have lived all their lives among the poor, and know where the shoe pinches."

"Why, ay, sir; our new work'us master be too much of a buck. I all'ays said so from the fust—thinks a sight too much of hisself: we wants older heads a deal than he."

"The fault's in the overseers, I suspect, Mr. Jones; you ought to be one yourself, and then you could keep this young spark in order. We could do very well with young workhouse masters, if we had old heads to overlook them, eh?"

"P'raps we might, sir, p'raps we might; I'm not altogether sartain: but they've no liking for me in the parish. The Tories want to have it all to themselves, and I ain't a man as chooses to say black's white, 'cos the squire does. I'm a free-born Englishman, and likes to have my rights."

"Of course, it is an Englishman's privilege; and when any man, be he squire or workhouse master, attempts to deprive his countrymen of it, then I say that man has no right to power, and I for one would cast him off."

"Well, now, that's hearty. Hanged if ever I heerd a Tory talk like that afore! You're a good sorted 'un, I think," said the farmer, vehemently, "an' speaks like a man should. I likes to hear a gentleman talk reasonable, and feel for the poor work'us creturs; so if you'll ride over to-night with the captin to my farm, my sons 'll be there, and p'raps you may kill two birds with the same stone, as the saying is. They've got votes, both on 'em, and I should like 'em to hear you talk: you does it right down well. I ain't bound to no man, no more ain't they: we pays our rent, and gies our votes where we chooses."

"You may be sure I'll bring him, Jones," said my father, laughing. "A glass of your ale, and three plumpers is worth a ride. But what 'll Mr. Marchant say? I hear he boasts that you and your lads daren't vote against his will: don't let us get you into a scrape, you know."

"He says so, do he? well, I'll show him whether I dare or no. I'm an Englishman, and I'll have my rights; so now, sir, if I'm in the same mind to-night as I am now, I'll promise you my vote, and my boys' too: they dar'n't disobey me, no more than they dare fly. The captin joked when he said three plumpers, but may be I'll make his words true; and you'll see me and my two boys up at Yeadly booth o'

Thursday morning, please God we're alive. I'll show him whether I dare or no. Good-morning, gentlemen, good-morning; we all'ays dines at one o'clock on Sundays, and my missis don't like to be kept waiting."

"Bless that old Betty and her fainting fit," cried the hopeful candidate as the farmer walked off; "who'd ever have thought that innocent old rebel would have taken to the sugar-candy so naturally!"

"But his landlord?" asked my mother.

"Oh, he dare not quarrel with him," said my father. "Jones holds a long lease of his farms, and is a useful fellow at times when the exchequer's low."

"Heaven bless these Whigs! and send them a long life and a merry one: they're as jealous of their rights as any bashaw with three tails; and one can make them believe green's blue, if one only goes about it properly."

Although nobody had been specially invited, yet, somehow or other, the luncheon table that day at Ingerdyne was surrounded with guests, both from the immediate neighborhood and the other end of the county. The stables and court-yard were full of horses and carriages; while all the boys who could be pressed into the service, walked the saddle-horses up and down under the shade of the old trees.

"Capital idea that of yours, Maudesley, in church this morning; does you infinite credit," said a gentleman to him, nodding across a glass of champagne.

"What, that old lady's fainting fit? 'Pon my honor, I'd nothing to do with it, except to carry her out: and really, if her weight is any criterion of the quantity and quality of food she gets at the workhus', you ought all to be indicted under the cruelty to animals bill: she weighs hardly as much as a dozen well-fed sparrows."

"What a pity you did not find that out before. It would have been a capital subject to expatiate upon with all the old women round the county: it would have got you no end of votes," cried somebody.

"Let us be thankful for what we have got, and 'turn you thanks for all," quoted my father.

"But now to business. I want you, Maudesley, to come with General Vaughton and me into the library and look at the county map. I have been parceling it out into districts for canvassing," and rising as he spoke, he led the way from the room, and the party separated.

In the evening we all rode to farmer Jones's. Just before we reached his house, we met his landlord, who was riding at a very sulky pace, and looked as black as a thunder-storm. He was a retired linen-draper, who had in some way or other got together a large property, and waged perpetual warfare against all the gentry of the neighborhood, in revenge for their declining his acquaintance. He warned off the hunt; prosecuted the sportsmen who by mistake crossed a corner of his land in pursuit of their game; bought up the foxes at a ruinous price, and shot them directly afterward; winked at, if he did not encourage, poaching; and, in short, annoyed every body in every way. He would have done any thing on earth, except become papist, to secure the visiting acquaintance of the county families; but having signally failed in all his attempts to accomplish this, he turned savage

became an ultra-radical—something like what we call a Chartist nowadays—and was a thorn in every body's side. He had two sons, both of whom were now being educated at Oxford. Their expenses there were said to be excessive; and it was whispered about, that more than once, Mr. Marchant had been glad to receive a quarter's rent or two in advance, from Jones and other well-to-do tenants upon his farms. Such was the man who now rode up to my father.

"Good-evening, captain; I was just coming to see you. I hear you've wheedled my tenant Jones into promising your friend his vote: he's just told me so; and if he does, by —, out of his farm he goes, neck and heels! I've told him so. What the devil do we want with strangers here—no offense to Mr. Maudesley—when we've got men of our own county coming forward? I've pledged myself and my interest to Sir James Ingram, and I don't take it gentlemanly of you, captain, to come on my land in this way seducing my tenants."

"As far as I know, Mr. Marchant, I am on the public road, and I certainly was not aware that there was any thing ungentlemanly in canvassing your tenants. However, I must bow to your better knowledge of such things, and as we are rather late, I have the honor to wish you good-evening."

With low bows to him from each of the party, our horses were put into a canter, and we left the ruffled draper to his meditations.

When we reached Four Oaks, a most ridiculous scene met our eyes. At the farm-house door, stood Jones's horse saddled and bridled, with the farmer trying to mount him, notwithstanding the efforts of his wife, who clung to his arm beseeching and scolding alternately. At the horse's head was one of his sons, who came from a neighboring parish; while the pretty daughter, who had been selected by Mr. Maudesley for Betty's companion in the morning, stood at the door of the house with several of the young farmers, who with their wives or sisters, had come from the places round; and most of whom we knew to be inclined to, if not actual supporters of, the other side.

As we entered the yard, we heard Mrs. Jones say, "Now, dont'ee go, John! dont'ee go to make a fool of yerself in yer old age. What's this fine dandified Lunnuner to us, that we should rile the squire for him?"

"Squire, indeed! a pretty squire, with his cotton and tape. To go for to tell me as I shouldn't vote for who I'd a mind. I'll teach him," and again he tried to put his foot in the stirrup; but Mrs. Jones was no fairy, and hampered his movements considerably.

"John Jones, you're a fool, and don't know what's good for ye," she cried. "You teach! it's you as wants teaching."

"Mother, mother!" exclaimed the daughter, who now saw us, and whose face crimsoned to as bright a hue as the carnation she wore in her girdle, "don't go on so; here's Captain Sackville and some more gentlemen."

"Now then, wife, let me go," shouted Jones, throwing off his lady's tender embrace; it's you as is the fool, I think, bawling so. I'm glad to see ye, gentlemen. I was just a coming to Ingerdynes. My landlord—the squire, as my

wife calls him—has been here a-bullying me, and he says as how he'll turn me (that's my sons and me) out o' our farms, if we vote for your friend. But law's law, and I've got a lease as 'll last many a day arter he's dead an' gone: so a brass button for his big words. I upholds liberty, and I'll stick up for my own; and if them two sons o' mine expects to have a shilling o' my money, they'd better do as I tell 'em now, that's all."

"I'm sure, I'm heartily obliged to you, Jones," said Mr. Maudesley, "I like your English spirit: but I don't want any man to serve me to his own injury; and, while I thank you for your goodwill, and value it more than I can well tell you, yet I would not have you do yourself harm, to do me good."

"There now, do listen to the gentleman, John. You see he gives you back your promise, and advises you for your good."

"That's more than you do, wife. Do hold yer noise, and go in. Here, Jack, take this here beast into the stable, and then come and hold the gentlemen's horses a bit. You'll come in and take a drop of ale arter yer ride, captin."

"Of course: next to the votes, that's what I came for. Come, Mrs. Jones, don't look cross. I mean to dance with you at the ball; and pretty Mary there must come up to Ingerdynes to help us to tie up our colors for the fight. Eh, Mary? We've got all the pretty girls in H—, and we musn't miss you," said my father.

"Ah! captain," said the old lady, shaking her head, "we all knows what you are."

"That's a comfort! I like to be appreciated. Come, Flor., jump off, and go and settle with Miss Jones when we shall send for her to-morrow."

Simpering with pleasure, and blushing with vanity, Mary led the way to a pleasant arbor-seat, under the shade of a huge walnut-tree.

"Will you please to sit here, miss, while I go and fetch a dish of summer apples: they're just ripe?"

She soon returned, accompanied by her mother and several of the women whom I had seen standing by the door when we arrived. They did not follow Mary and her mother when they came up to me, but wandered about the garden, smelling the wallflowers, picking the stocks, and looking exceedingly as if they expected an invitation to join us.

"Don't let me keep your friends from this arbor, Mrs. Jones," I said; "it is very hot out in the sun, pray ask them to come in."

No second bidding was needed, and in a few minutes the little bower was crowded. For a short time we managed to talk about hens and chickens, dairies and the hay-harvest, the death of the old parish doctur, and what a loss he would be; but after a little time we began to get horribly tired of each other, and longed most anxiously to see the gentlemen out again in the yard. But there were three or four men in the farmer's parlor, whose votes were not yet promised to either of the candidates, and it did not do to leave them while a chance remained of winning their suffrages. At last, to our great delight, they came out, followed by our host and his friends; who had been mightily raised in their own estimation by the flatteries of the vote-hunters and the farmer's ale, and were laughing loudly.

"By-the-by, Jones," said my father, as we were riding out of the yard, "we shall have you in our procession to-morrow? I should like to show the enemy as bold a front as possible."

"Oh, ay, captain, I'll come; and maybe bring one or two more."

"There's a good fellow! We all meet at the Black Swan at ten o'clock, and I shall look out for you. Good-night. I shall send for you by daylight to-morrow, Mary: mind you're ready, smiles and all. Good-night."

On Monday morning by daybreak, our band, which had been brought from town, was playing the most spirited airs in front of the Ingerdyne windows; and at seven o'clock a sumptuous champagne breakfast was prepared, to which about thirty gentlemen sat down, previous to setting off for the county town, which was twelve miles distant. At nine o'clock my mother and I, with the wives of Mr. Maudesley's proposer and seconder, General Vaughton, and Mr. Howitt, left Ingerdyne in an open carriage.

The road was literally covered with people and vehicles; for the town was situated in a corner of the county, as it were, and the partisans of each side were coming in from all quarters. Every now and then a carriage and four, from which streamed banners and flags, dashed by us at full speed; groups of farmers, clad in their Sunday attire, jogged along on their cobs, wearing huge rosettes in their button holes and at their horses' heads. Chaise carts rattled past filled with chairs occupied by girls decked out in all their finery, heightened by the ribbons and handkerchiefs of their favorites' colors. All the people were laughing and full of excitement; scarcely one of them but was eager in favor of one or other of the candidates; and the girls, although many were neither daughters nor sisters of voters, had been won over by the handsome face and honeyed words of the canvassers to influence their sweethearts and relatives.

Popular favor was pretty equally divided between Mr. Maudesley and George Redfern. Both were young, graceful, courteous, and "daft hands at the blarney;" but the higher the rank of the women, the more partisans had the stranger. George Redfern was engaged to his cousin, a haughty beauty and an heiress; Mr. Maudesley was free: a prize that any girl as yet might hope to win. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was the favorite; especially as Mr. Comberton was an old married man, with a fine family of daughters; and Sir James Ingram was a domestic tyrant, and as ugly as Caliban.

When we drove into the market-place, where the hustings had been erected, the crowd, on recognizing the liveries and colors, set up a tremendous shout of mingled cheers and hisses. A carriage full of ladies from Redfern had just drawn up at the hotel in which was their committee-room; and conspicuous among the party was Lady Redfern, stepmother of the candidate (his father had married her for her great Indian fortune). She was rather old, and extremely plain; but still wishing to be thought youthful, and a belle, was dressed in the most absurd style.

Pink and green being the Redfern colors, she wore a grass-green satin pelisse, a brilliant pink bonnet with a green feather, a pink scarf and pink gloves. Upon a fair girl of eighteen, the dress and the bonnet might have been pardoned

ble—at an election; but worn by an ugly woman of sixty, who looked ten years older, their effect was outrageous.

The mob, ever on the search for the ludicrous, cheered her most vociferously, as, in a state of nervous excitement, she stood up in the carriage, and shook her long flaxen ringlets with a girlish air, at her son-in-law, who ran down to receive her; and the jeers which her costume and manner elicited, brought the color into George Redfern's face as he handed her out. But the object of them was so blinded and deafened by age and vanity, that she simpered and smiled, showed her false teeth, and shook her borrowed ringlets, until her persevering absurdity made the market-place to re-echo with shouts of laughter; and having seated herself upon a tall stool in the balcony, she was a constant object of amusement during the day.

In our balcony we found the wives and daughters of some of the most influential supporters of Mr. Maudesley, including many of the prettiest and most distinguished girls in the county; and certainly, as far as the ladies went, the Tory cause appeared in the ascendant.

The sun shone brilliantly on the scene of noise and bustle, and good-humor every where prevailed. After the customary formalities and speeches, which were, as usual, vociferously cheered by the friends, and as vehemently hooted by the opponents, of the respective candidates, the sheriff called for a show of hands. The show was decidedly in favor of Mr. Redfern and Mr. Maudesley, but a poll was demanded for Sir James and Mr. Comberton; and in a very short time the busy hustings were deserted, the candidates had returned to their committee-rooms, and we drove back to Ingerdyne.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN incident of an alarming nature, which occurred previous to the polling-day, materially influenced the result of the canvass, and varied the monotonous bustle of electioneering busbush.

H—— is a very straggling county, throwing out its limbs far and wide, and in consequence the polling places were much apart, and some of them at great distances from the county town. The cross-country roads were wretchedly bad, and our great difficulty was in procuring a sufficient number of well-mounted messengers.—Every place, however, was visited by my father, General Vaughton, and Mr. Maudesley in person. Every member of the district committees was seen, and all the electors who were not known to be adverse to us were waited upon by one or other of these gentlemen, properly attended.

Ingerdyne was their head-quarters till the day of the election, it being more central than the county town; and refreshments were always ready in the dining-room and library, both day and night. It was generally very late when they all came in, and the accounts they brought were not very cheering. Three or four farmers who had promised their votes hung back, evidently in fear of their landlords; and many who were marked "favorable" upon the canvass-books, now declared positively for the other

side. There was a terrible defection, and even the most sanguine among us began to dread the result of the poll, when the disastrous occurrence before alluded to changed the aspect of affairs.

The evening previous to the election, Miss Vaughton and I, attended by a servant, had ridden out in the direction of Hayley, to meet our respective fathers on their return from Bishop's Crawford; and about six miles from home we joined them, Mr. Maudesley having just before overtaken them on his way from another town. He complained of feeling ill, and indeed looked so wretchedly harassed, that it was settled between the gentlemen, that my father, the General, and the other companions of Mr. Maudesley, should go on to H—, leaving him to ride leisurely home with us, that he might take some rest at Ingerdyne. Our groom was sent off with a penciled dispatch to the chairman of the district committee at Burleigh, with orders to lose no time in bringing back an answer; and each party having briefly reported the result of the day's work, they separated.

"Now, young ladies," said Mr. Maudesley, when the other gentlemen had ridden off, "I know a nice bridle-road across these fields, which will take us home more quickly and pleasantly than clattering along this hard dusty road: what say you, shall we try it?"

We agreed, and rode on silently, for the candidate seemed in no mood to talk; and, as our way lay along the headlands of plowed fields, and through one or two little woods, we had enough to do in guiding the steps of our horses, without talking. At last we emerged upon a wide table-land, of considerable extent. Just before us lay a long valley, in the centre of which, but hidden from our sight by the tall thick trees, was a small village. Evening was closing in, and the eastern sky wore a dull, leaden look, as if all its morning gold had departed to ornament the west; although reflected against the gloomy background was a lurid red light, or rather fiery glow, too force and angry to be the reflection of sunset hues. We all pointed it out simultaneously, with an exclamation of wonder; but in a minute Mr. Maudesley exclaimed, "It's a fire—the village is on fire! Let us ride on."

The words were scarcely uttered, when our horses were at the top of their speed; and, as we descended into the valley, we saw bright flames burst from the red haze, and clearly defined against the leaden sky. It was only about eight o'clock; but, from the stillness which prevailed, it appeared as if, early as it was, the villagers had gone to bed. We soon gained the high road, for our horses flew over the ground; and just as we reached the turnpike, a terrible scream echoed through the valley, telling that some one besides ourselves had discovered the danger. The turnpike-man, knowing us, threw open his gate with a smile; which was changed into a stare of bewilderment when I called out, pointing forward with my whip, "A fire in the village!"

The cry we had first heard was by this time taken up by many voices, and the screams sounded distressingly on the hot, heavy air. Just as we galloped into the village, a sharp brisk wind, which had blown at intervals during the day, arose again, and the flames thus fanned burst

forth at once from the thatched roofs of several cottages. The village street was as empty as if it had been midnight: not a creature was to be seen there; but many heads were thrust out of the upper casements, uttering wild shrieks of terror.

Mr. Maudesley rode up to the first burning cottage, and called to the terrified inmates to come down; but fear had mastered their reason, and they only screamed frantically. The wind swept down the hill, the flames hissed and crackled in the thatch, and the burning embers were borne by the breeze far up the street. It seemed as if the whole place must inevitably be burned down, for the cottages were all built in a row.

"What is to be done?" cried Mr. Maudesley; "how far are we from Ingerdyne?"

"Five miles: we have come out of our way ever since we left the hill."

"Which of you will ride there at full speed, and send off the for the nearest engine?"

"I will," cried I, eagerly.

"No, Florence; you can help here better than I can: you know the people, and will be useful."

"I'll go and return with help," said Mary Vaughton; who, older than myself by some years, always acted with spirit and discretion.

"Do, do: but be quick—for Heaven's sake, be quick!"

"I'll be there in less than half an hour," and at a gentle touch of her whip, the spirited Arabian which she rode sprang forward, and was presently out of sight.

Unhappily, most of the burning cottages were occupied as a kind of almshouses by the aged and bed-ridden poor of the parish, and consequently many of their inhabitants were incapable of helping themselves, or of escaping from the danger. A great majority of the men were from home, having been enticed to H— by the gayeries going on there during the election; so the little village was now almost deserted by all who could have afforded help in this emergency. Some of the people who lived at the farther end of the place were at home, but they seemed to be immovable, since neither the screams of their terrified neighbors, nor the noise of the flames aroused them from their sleep.

"Who keeps the church keys, that we may ring the bells?" cried Mr. Maudesley: "these cottages will be burned to the ground, if we can't get assistance."

At this moment it occurred to me that, at a large uninhabited mansion close by, there was an immense alarm bell, powerful enough to be heard for miles. I knew that the house was empty, but thought that some door or other might be open, through which I could get at the bell. I was not disappointed, and in a few minutes the sonorous alarm was pealing out its unwonted summons over the valley and hills. It was lightly hung, and as I pulled with all my strength, the clamor was tremendous. This had the effect of rousing the sleepers from their beds, and the affrighted from their stupor; every body flocked out of doors, and the streets were speedily alive with men, women, and children: but none of them being more than half dressed, and all running to and fro in every direction, without purpose, they only impeded each other's movements, and increased the confusion and noise.

Having effectually raised an alarm, I was

the best of my way back to the fire. The heat was suffocating, and the cries of the women and children were heart-rending. Just as I reached the spot, the fire had communicated with a good sized house belonging to a Whig farmer in the neighborhood, who had let it furnished to an invalid family from London, by whom it had been left only the day before. No one was in it, and the fire had evidently got firm hold of the building. People ran about gesticulating, shouting, crying, praying, but doing nothing, and to add to the distraction of the scene, Mr. Pritchard, the owner of the large house, rode furiously up, and commanded all hands to set to work and save his furniture.

"It is useless, sir," cried Mr. Maudesley, who was over-excited by his unavailing efforts to get the mob into working order; "it is madness. Let us save life. Help me to rescue these poor old women and children: what are tables and chairs when life and limbs are in danger?"

"Bravo!" cried out a loud voice from the crowd: "hearken to the gentleman."

"Hearken to me, you fellows!" cried Mr. Pritchard, savagely. "I know you all, and those who work for me, and if you don't do as I bid you, by —! I'll turn you all off to-morrow to starve."

"Shame! shame!" called the same voice, which had spoken before. I looked earnestly in the direction from whence it came, but could not recognize the speaker.

"I'll teach you to call shame on me, you thieving Tory blackguard!" shouted the farmer.

"Thief to yourself, Muster Pritchard!" retorted the man, elbowing his way from the crowd, and standing fiercely before him. "I'm as good a man as you any time, and can have a better character than ever you'll get, go where you will."

"Silence! silence!" cried Mr. Maudesley, in a clear, authoritative voice; "come and work, if you are men; and don't wrangle there while people are being burned to death. We can't save property, but we may save life."

"Oh, my mother! my poor mother!" screamed a frantic woman who came rushing down the village. "Where is she? Save her, for God's sake! She hasn't moved hand or foot these six months."

"Where is she?" asked Mr. Maudesley.

"There—in there!" and she pointed to a cottage which we had thought empty, so quiet had it been, and above which the flames played as in triumph.

"Now then, my lads!" he cried, "set your shoulders to the door, break it in, and I will go up-stairs, and bring down the old woman. And do you," he said, addressing the crowd, "do the same for the other cottages. Let us get the people out, and then save what we can. Here, my boy, take this horse and tie him up to some tree where he'll be safe. You ride on to the parsonage, Miss Sackville, and tell them what has happened down here."

"By — sir! am I to be disobeyed by my own men?" cried Mr. Pritchard, furious at the prospect of his loss. "What's the use of taking them off to those infernal cottages? every thing in the whole row is not worth five pounds. They work for me, and I have a right to order them to save my property. Things are come to a pretty

pass, I think, when a master's to be defied by his own. Who are you I should like to know, to set up ordering other folks' servants? The fellows shall do as I say, or they shall repent it."

"You are mad, sir, I hope," replied Mr. Maudesley, coldly, "and don't know what you say. I can't waste time in talking to you: you have my free leave to take every man who will follow you. This gentleman's a Whig, my lads, and votes for liberty! You see what sort of liberty you are likely to get from him. Now then, those who choose, go with him; the rest do as I bid you. Break in those doors, and a sovereign for every body rescued from the fire."

And in a very short time, so heartily did they all work, that every cottage was emptied of its inhabitants. Two, the end ones, fell in during the operations; but, happily, all the people had been got out.

Mr. Maudesley, who had thrown off his neckerchief and waistcoat, though he retained his coat and hat as some protection from the flames and sparks, worked energetically. He had formed a line of men and women, extending from a large pond in the middle of the village to the burning houses; pails, jugs, buckets, and any thing that would hold water, were handed along to a few resolute men, who, mounted upon ladders or the roofs of the houses nearest to the fire, poured water on them to keep the heated thatch wet.

Meanwhile the family from the parsonage had arrived, and we occupied ourselves in attending upon the miserable and helpless old people and children. It was touching to see how fondly the poor creatures clung to the hope of saving their furniture. Ancient and rickety as it was, it was priceless to them: most of them had occupied the same dwellings for more than half a century, and every article was associated with some sad or pleasant memory.

The old clock had summoned them to their scanty meals and rest for the greater part of a long life; the chairs or tables were gifts from a parent or friend; and it was affecting to see the tears running down wrinkled cheeks, and sad to hear the tremulous voices pleading for the safety of some cherished household treasure. Mr. Maudesley persevered in his endeavors to save them, until the attempts became perilous to life; but then, urged by entreaties from all sides, he desisted. He had been touched with the cry of joy which greeted him upon his appearance from the cottages with any article he had been able to save, and with the words of gratitude and fondness with which the half-childish old people welcomed their rescued article.

Mr. Pritchard fared but ill: not half a dozen men could he persuade—for to that he had come at last—or threaten into his service. He was a tyrant and a miser; and those whom he had trampled on and ruled as with a rod of iron for years and years, gloried in the retribution this fire visited upon their oppressor.

Help soon reached us from Ingerdyne, Aston, and most of the neighboring houses and towns; but it was all too late to save the tenements. Every living creature was happily out of them, and we all gathered together upon the green, gazing mournfully on the smouldering heap of ruins. Sobs and cries mingled with the prayers of the now houseless people; and as one after another

of the lowly roofs fell in, there rose to Heaven a cry of grief that would have melted the hardest heart.

"Lord, look down upon us!" cried one old creature, who had been bedridden for many years, "and take us now; for we're like the Israelites in the land o' bondage."

"Well, it's well my poor old man's gone," said another, "or this 'ud a' killed him outright: we've lived in them cottages sixty years come Michaelmas."

"My poor old chair!" cried another; "that was all as I had left o' my poor girl's things: she give it me the day as she died, last bean-hoeing was thirty year; an' I loved it a'most as well as her. I'd rayther ha' died too, if so be they cou'n't ha' saved that."

"Where's the minister?" said another. "We be lost sheep now, surely."

"What be we to do now? The work'us is full, and there's no place on the face of the world but that for the likes o' we," cried one poor old soul.

"We war a burthen on the airth, and noo the rich folk ha' burnt us out on it," whined a querulous beldame.

Such expressions as these met us every where; and while some of the sufferers, especially the infirm, looked upon us with gratitude and respect, others talked as if we, or some of their superiors, had done the evil work from which they suffered. All, however, agreed in lauding the conduct of Mr. Maudesley; and when farmer Pritchard suggested that it was an election trick of the Tories to get their man into favor, he was hissed and hooted out of the village.

"We're none on us voters, worse luck!" said the sturdy fellow who had cried shame upon the farmer; "and most of us are agin the Tories; but if we'd ten votes apiece, you would ha' them, squire; and maybe to-night's work may help the 'lection more nor you think for. Some of these here poor-looking fellows ha' got friends better off than themselves, and none on 'em shall vote agin you, squire, if they can't vote for you."

It was very late when we all got home. The handsome candidate was sadly disfigured: his hair was singed, his hands seared, his left arm severely burned, and the wrist sprained, while a long wound across his temple had been caused by some falling rafter.

"Well, you certainly do not look very attractive," said the general, laughing, "but I question if all the loveliness of Apollo would serve you in such good stead at the poll to-morrow, as these scratches and bruises. You are a very lucky fellow, Maudesley."

"May difference of opinion never alter friendship!" quoted he. "Your idea of luck and mine do not exactly agree. My arm burns as if it were on a fire; and I sha'n't be fit to show my face in town for a month at least."

"Nonsense, man! why, you'll be a hero directly: the papers will crown you with laurels, and the girls will adore you. What would you have?"

"Less pain and more chance of a night's sleep. I wish you'd send to the town for your Esculapius, Sackville. I shall be good for nothing to-morrow if I don't get rest."

"I have already done so," said my mother. "When you first came in, I sent back one of the

men to bring Mr. Roberts instantly, and here he is already."

The next morning, at six o'clock, we assembled in the breakfast-room, and were soon joined by Mr. Maudesley. He looked pale and ill; and the wound upon his temple, and his arm which he wore in a sling, completed his dismal appearance. He was evidently suffering more than he chose to say, and I now remembered how much he had complained of illness the previous evening.

"It will be a sultry day," said he, languidly, looking out of the window at the heavy dew which hung in drops upon the grass, and the mist which was rolling off the meadows. "I don't know how I shall stand the heat and noise to-day: my head feels as if an engine were at work in it."

"Take a tumbler of champagne! nothing so good for a queer head in the morning as champagne," said Mr. Hollington.

"No, no; take a bottle of soda-water," cried my father.

"Be advised by me," said Mr. Roberts (who had staid all night, and was going with us to H—— to vote), "take nothing but a cup of Mrs. Sackville's tea, and a hard biscuit; you've been overworked lately, and want rest. Be careful of the bottle to-day, or you may get inflammation in some of those ugly places."

My father had arranged that the ladies should leave Ingerdyne very early, that we might get into H—— before the bustle began, so that the clock had not struck eight when we drove up to the hotel. My mother and Mrs. Vaughton wore buff watered-silk pelisses, and white chip bonnets trimmed with pale-blue ribbons and ostrich feathers; and Mary and I were dressed in white muslin, with sashes, ribbons, and scarfs, of the Maudesley colors. By half-past eight every window in the market square was filled with ladies, and at nine o'clock not a spare niche could have been found.

Just as the church bells chimed nine, the poll-clerk came forward on the platform and cried loudly, "The poll is open;" and then the business of the day began in earnest. Up from all corners hurried the electors, and as their badges were recognized, loud cheers or hisses greeted them.

The first man who polled for Mr. Maudesley was farmer Jones, who was followed by his two sons, Mary's sweetheart, and three of the men who had been at his house upon the evening of Mr. Maudesley's visit. Seven plumpers had thus been secured by the apropos fainting-fit of poor old Betty. When Jones and his party left the booth, they were saluted by a perfect storm of hisses from the pink and green and crimson men; they were hustled and pushed in all directions, until at last the Tories came to their relief, and forced a passage through the mob.

At one o'clock Mr. Maudesley, who had been at two of the nearest polling towns showing himself to his supporters, appeared on the platform, with his arm in a sling. He was received with tremendous cheers; for his gallant conduct the night before was now known, and the poor people were half frantic in their applause: still he was but third on the poll. At the close Mr. Maudesley was two hundred behind Mr. Redfern, and ninety-six behind Mr. Comberton.

Under these circumstances, my father and General Vaughton thought it right to remain at H—— all night, in order to keep a watch upon our men in the town. Mr. Maudesley, whose indisposition increased, was, with some difficulty, prevailed upon to go to bed, and leave the business in the hands of his friends; so we returned to Ingerdyne without any of our beaux. In the morning Mr. Maudesley was in a high fever, delirious, and in great danger.

Every body stood aghast at this unlooked-for misfortune; not a few spoke of the election as already lost, while some even suggested a withdrawal: but his committee were determined to contest the election inch by inch. Meanwhile the Whigs, having spread a report that our candidate, not liking the aspect of affairs, was off, many of those who had been won solely by Mr. Maudesley's fascinating manner, showed signs of going over to Mr. Redfern. In this emergency it was necessary that something should be done, and at once, and after a short consultation, General Vaughton came forward to address the people, who immediately upon seeing him cried out—"Maudesley! Maudesley! where's your man? Why don't he show?" These, and other less complimentary salutations, being mingled with a deafening uproar, compounded of catcalls, whoops, whistles, yells, groans, hisses, cheers, mingled with exclamations of "shame!" "hear him!" "hear him!"

At last the noise subsided, and the general advanced, hat in hand, and in a clear voice, which could be heard in every corner of the square, said:

"Gentlemen, I have the honor to appear before you on behalf of my friend Mr. Maudesley. You have called for him, and I am here to inform you why it is impossible for him to answer your summons." At these words a yell of exulting triumph, which would have done credit to any troop of Red Indians, rent the sky. When it had subsided, the general continued: "I am sorry that you have thought fit to mark your displeasure at Mr. Maudesley's absence in the manner you have just done, and so I am sure you will be when I tell you that he lies at the Rose Hotel in a most dangerous condition, from the wounds and excitement consequent upon his heroic exertions during the whole of the night before last, when he was engaged in saving the lives of the cottagers from the fire at Ardington. (Loud cheers.) Not a single life was lost, and he rescued from death six souls by his own hand. (another burst of cheers.) And when I tell you that the very last action of which he was conscious was to send clothes and money to the sufferers, you will, I am sure, be sorry that you have been so hasty in condemning a man who has brought illness, or it may be death, upon himself, by his courage and humanity."

"Three cheers for Maudesley!" were now called for, and given with such tremendous effect that the general was obliged to stop and content himself with bowing repeatedly.

What else the general said could only be heard by those near him, for the crowd became outrageous against the Whig candidates; and poor Sir James Ingram, who just then drove into the square in a dashing equipage, was greeted with such a storm of yells and hisses, that the little man trembled and turned pale at

this unlooked-for manifestation of popular feeling.

Every hour after this, until the poll closed, showed a steady increase in Mr. Maudesley's favor; and when the clock struck four, full of hope, although with breathless anxiety, we waited to learn the result. This was soon displayed in the board which was quickly hung out, and which exhibited a majority for us of twelve over Mr. Comberton.

But the battle, although won here, had yet to be ultimately decided by the returns from so many places, that we had almost as many fears as hopes. It was evident now that the struggle was between Mr. Maudesley and Mr. Comberton, for we felt that Mr. Redfern was—in electioneering phrase—safe to come in, and that there was very little chance for Sir James Ingram. General Vaughton and my father had arranged and carried out the plan of the campaign with strategic skill and soldierlike energy: indeed all concerned had lent their best aid; and the result was that Mr. Maudesley, at the close of the poll at H——, had a small majority of twelve over Mr. Comberton.

I am not sure whether we joined the shout which was given by our party below when the white chalk board was displayed; but I know that I caught staid Mary Vaughton round the waist, and waltzed up and down the room until we were both nearly exhausted, and was only brought to my senses by my mother saying in a warning voice:

"Don't rejoice too soon, Florence; we have the majority here, but who knows how it may be at other places? Wait till to-morrow, before you go into these ecstasies."

My mother's apprehensions, however, were groundless; for when the poll-books were opened, to every body's great astonishment, Mr. Maudesley and Mr. Comberton were declared the fortunate men; having, in the northern division of the county, passed Mr. Redfern by a majority which placed them at the head of the poll by the magnificent numbers of three and five respectively.

All this was very delightful, for we could now be friendly as ever at Aston, without the perpetual bitterness of reflecting that either had been beaten by the instrumentality of the other. With the Redferns we had never been very intimate, and, therefore, the result of the contest could cause no unpleasantness of feeling; but Aston and Ingerdyne had so long been inseparable, that it would have been a source of continual mortification for either party to have aided in the conquest of the other.

Mr. Maudesley soon recovered, and in a few weeks H——shire was quiet again. Half-a-dozen dinners, two or three balls, as many public meetings, and a few speeches of thanks, and the bustle was over.

CHAPTER XV.

DURING all that autumn my father never visited Ingerdyne, except on his way to and from Newmarket; and when the hunting season came on, he brought with him friends whose habits were too much like his own for my mother to derive much pleasure from their society.

My father's temper had now become more terrible than ever. Every one but myself was frightened by it; but somehow or other I never felt afraid of him. If I had loved him more, or known my duty better, I must have grieved and sorrowed for him; but as it was, I braved his most furious tempests of rage, with a sort of resentful indifference. If any thing unpleasant had to be told to him, any trifling breach of duty on the part of the servants to be confessed, any request for an indulgence to be made, I was always employed as the mediator. I have known my mother remain in her room for a fortnight, in terror of his passion; I have seen Helen tremble and turn deathly pale at the sound of his voice; I have heard the servants run from his sight like criminals; but I was never moved: and actuated, I suppose, by a kind of wonder, or, perhaps, admiration of my fearlessness, my father never stormed at me. He would heap all sorts of contemptuous epithets upon those for whom I spoke, and say the most insulting and cruel things to others; but to me individually, he never addressed any. There was something, either in my look or manner, my absence of fear, perhaps, that preserved me from his angry ebullitions. I certainly did not owe my immunity to his love for me; but to a feeling half shame, half weakness. He knew that, say what he would, I should not shrink away terrified; and my calm and unmoved silence was more embarrassing than any opposition.

What a horrible state of things was this, when a girl of sixteen dared, and was in a measure compelled, to scorn and defy her father! True, I never spoke; but if half the contemptuous undutifulness of my heart was written in my face, there was no need of words to express what I felt and thought.

Never, surely, was there a more wretched home than ours at Ingerdyne. Many and many a time I would have gladly changed places with the poorest village girl I knew. Peace—peace! we knew not what it meant when my father was with us; so trifling a thing was now sufficient to enrage him beyond control. And my mother was become so satirical, so bitter and unconciliating, that even when we might have enjoyed an interval of quiet, her manner would rouse the slumbering fiend.

Poor Helen! Of all of us, she suffered most: from my heart I pitied her, and at any risk used to hide her away from the storm. My father had never loved her; for she was too childish, both in mind and manner, to please him. Besides, she prided herself upon her English descent, vehemently disclaiming all Irish affection and feeling; and this enraged him. She was certainly very lovely, but she was so idolized by my mother, and so petted by those who wished to please her, that her character was weakened by flattery and indulgence. Thus, more than any one else, she suffered from my father's temper.

Once—I shall never forget it—she lost the power of speech, for two whole days, from terror. It was on a Sunday, when we had all walked home from church, that the incident occurred; and every circumstance is vividly present to my mind.

I must premise that it was an order of my father, that no servant, having been once dis-

charged from his service, should ever again set foot even in the grounds, upon any pretense whatever; and any person inviting or receiving such a one, was instantly dismissed. This was a rule so well known in the family, that no one who had ever been a member of it a single week, could have pleaded ignorance.

On the Tuesday previous to this Sunday, my father had dismissed a groom who had been detected in robbing the horses of their corn, and who upon his knavery being discovered, had been most abominably insolent: he had refused to take his clothes with him when he left, and, although told by his master that he should not return to fetch them, persisted in going away without them. Twice, since his dismissal, my father had found him in the court-yard, and upon both occasions he had been abusive and insolent to a degree that alarmed his late fellow-servants for the consequence. But my father kept his temper wonderfully, though it was easy to see how deeply he was enraged, and he warned the man, that if ever he came upon the premises again, he would punish him in a way that he should remember for life.

There was a little covered walk leading from the lower garden into the court-yard, up which we usually came from church. It was a very narrow path, so that two persons could not walk in it abreast, and, on this occasion, my father was first, and I last in the procession. The afternoon was lovely, and I lingered behind to gather some flowers; but I had not been so engaged long, when I heard my father's voice speaking loudly in those tones of rage we all knew so well. Dropping my bouquet, I ran down the walk to the court-yard, where I saw Robert (the discharged groom) standing by a horse-block brushing some clothes which he had taken from a bundle that lay before him, and looking insolently at my father the while. His face was flushed, for he had evidently been drinking, and his eyes glared with malice and effrontery. My father was very pale, and a stick which he carried trembled from the violence of his agitation; it was easy to see that the fiend within was busy tempting him to some desperate act.

"Leave those things, and go out of this yard instantly," he said, in a low, deep voice of suppressed passion.

"Presently, captain, presently," replied the man, with his insolent laugh. "Don't be in a hurry."

"Go this moment, or I tell you that you stand in greater peril than you ever did in all your life before. I'm in no humor to be trifled with."

"Don't put yourself in a passion, captain; it makes no odds to me now. I'm no soldier or servant of yours now, thank my stars!"

"Go, go! If you value your life, *fool*, go!" said my father, between his closed teeth.

"I told you, presently, captain. I arn't done yet." And he went on brushing and hissing, as grooms do when they are currying a horse.

My father's face turned ghastly pale, and his voice was hoarse and husky, as he said:

"You are going too far: trying how much I will bear. Now be warned, and go; for if you stay in this yard one minute longer, you shall rue it to the last moment of your life."

"Why, captain, what'll you do?" Thrash v with a cat o'-nine-tails?"

My father had made one step forward, when my mother caught his arm, and said to the man, "Go, Robert, this instant. How dare you insult your master? Go!"

"My master! that's a good joke: my masters have always been gentlemen, as knowed a good servant when they had him, and didn't demean themselves to measuring corn-bins. Them beggarly Irish may stand it; but I shan't. Master, indeed!"

"Silence, Robert, and go," said my mother; for she saw there was a dangerous look in her husband's eye.

"I shan't; let him turn me out: I won't stir a peg."

My father flung off his wife's hold as if it had been an infant's grasp, and turning, went toward the house with gigantic strides.

"Going to fetch help, captain?" sneered the man, laughing impudently.

In a minute my father returned, holding in his hand a pistol; one of a pair which he had loaded in the morning and left upon the library-table.

"Gerald! Gerald! for God's love!" cried my mother.

Helen screamed, and I felt sick as death, and caught his arm; but he threw me to a distance, as he had done my mother, and went up to the man, who stood before him, all his color gone, but even yet with a defying look.

"Will you go? Once more, I bid you leave this place. Another moment, and though I die for it, your soul shall go to judgment."

"Go, go, Robert! for God's sake!" cried my mother, imploringly.

The man stood like a block of stone.

"Now, WILL YOU GO? I speak for the last time," said my father, in a deep voice, hoarse with passion.

I heard the click of the pistol, as the trigger went back to the half-cock, and rushing forward I pushed the man violently; but he stood immovable. My father's face was rigid as iron.

"Father! father!—mercy! Go, Robert, go!"

Neither moved; but my father's breath labored heavily as he held out the deadly weapon.

"Why don't you fire? I won't stir till I'm carried off."

The sound of the trigger, brought to the full cock, struck on my ears.

"Then God have mercy on you!" muttered my father, and with the words there rang through the air the sharp report of the pistol. One loud scream from Helen, and she fell senseless on the stones; while my mother covered her eyes and groaned bitterly.

I had been clinging to the man, and now found myself on the ground; he had fallen and borne me with him. In an instant I was on my feet. The yard was filling with servants, brought by the sound of the shot from the house and stables. They lifted the man up, thinking he was dead; and so, indeed, he looked, for his face was livid white with terror; but, happily, he was unhurt. God's angel, who turned the muzzle aside, and made the soldier's unerring aim to miss, alone can tell how it was that he was saved. He *was saved*; but Helen was speechless for two whole days. At one time we thought her senses were gone; but my mother was spared that misery, and after a time she quite recovered from the shock.

The next day my father, himself a magistrate, was summoned to appear before the bench to answer for the outrage. An attorney newly come to the place, who fancied he had cause of offense against Captain Sackville for his quick and scornful manner, took up the case, and meant to press it strongly; in which event it must have gone hard with my father. But, fortunately, a gentleman who happened to come down from London on a visit to Mr. Comberton, saw Robert in the street just before the magistrates sat, and recognized him as a man who had formerly lived in his service, who had robbed him and absconded. He followed the fellow immediately, and soon convinced him that it would be more conducive to his safety to go quietly home, than to prefer a charge which would certainly be succeeded by his own apprehension. To the great satisfaction of every one, therefore, and our unspeakable relief, the case ended thus abruptly.

My father left Ingerdyne for London on the day following, having only waited until it appeared that Helen's life was safe. But who can tell what we, who were left behind, suffered of shame and mortification? The story, bad enough in itself, was magnified by degrees into absolute murder, and we were all looked upon as having been actors in a fearful drama, ending in assassination. At church, and in our rides, people stared fixedly at us, as if to see what trace of the deed was left upon our brows. I never alluded to the occurrence, for it drove me nearly wild even to think of it; but Helen talked about it perpetually, and thus I learned what people said and thought.

She took a strange pleasure in descanting upon her fears and sufferings; upon what she had felt when the man refused to go, and how she had trembled when the pistol was fired: every feeling was made the subject of a discussion, and every pain a bait for pity. I felt sick at heart with shame, and unable to say whether I had seen or felt any thing; answering any one who had the bad taste to mention the subject to me, almost savagely. No wonder, therefore, people shrugged their shoulders, and told each other that I was as reckless and unfeeling as my father. All this I heard from Helen, who had a propensity for repeating all sorts of unpleasant things.

During the next summer, my mother, Helen, and myself, went upon a visit to an elderly gentleman who lived in a curious old mansion on the borders of Bewdley Forest, in Worcestershire.

Mr. Lyle was a very old friend of my mother's, and the most delightful person I ever met: cheerful in temper, high-bred in manner, and full of traditions about fairies and the stars. He professed a belief in astrology and *faerie-ology*, and used to delight in telling me stories of fairy-land and legends of the stars.

My mother and Helen visited a great deal while we were at Forest Home; but I preferred to stay with our host, greedily devouring his legends and prophecies.

The forest, upon the edge of which the house was built, was very large; such a one as I had read of, but never before seen: and along the wide grassy roads made for timber carting, Mr. Lyle and I used to walk for hours, now and then resting at the foot of some great tree, and watching the sunbeams as they glanced in and out. Oh, how happy I was! Never before had I felt

such peace as I now enjoyed. I had no *fear* at home, for I did not dread my father; but there was about every place where he might come an air of unrest, which generated an uneasy feeling, as if your quiet was an insecure thing: and this made home at Ingerdyne any thing but a place of repose.

In these deep woods, listening to the forest birds, and *feeling* the silence, from the start any sudden noise gave you—looking down vistas of trees, which seemed interminable, and catching the stray sunlight as it peeped in, and lay upon the turf as though it fondly loved its velvet couch—rest and peace were blessings I could realize. And I used to think that, to live forever in that great old house, with the privilege of riding and walking in the forest at will, would be greater happiness than wealth and rank and the world, could ever give. I was only sixteen then, and I *thought* so: I am more than double that age now, and I *know* so.

On moonlight nights, Mr. Lyle would make me his companion, as he walked up and down the avenue of tall elms which led into the forest from the east side of the house; and then, while I listened with deep attention, would point out the stars in the vault above us, and tell me wondrous tales of their connection with our fate. And now, for the first time in my life, I told to believing ears, a story which even my mother had laughed at; but in which I then, as now, as really and earnestly believed, as in my own existence. To others it may be a superstition, to me it is a fact.

"And why not, Florence?" asked Mr. Lyle, in those deep, calm tones which sink with a strange power into the heart. "Why may not the Star of your fate become visible to you at times, as a guide and beacon? Look up into that serene and solemn sky, glittering with its millions of lights! Can you believe that God has placed them there, beautiful but useless? Can you think that of all creation they only are without significance? Why should it not be given to them to watch over the fate and life of those who will hereafter shine like them forever? A Star led the wise men of old to the birthplace of their Lord; then stood still, and having fulfilled its mission, vanished. May not a similar agency be used to comfort, or warn, or lead Christ's people in these latter years—when holy things seem in danger of being reasoned away, and nothing believed in that is not understood? Oh, these are sad times when the tangible is the only real, and bold men cast doubts upon the holy faith that has come down to us from Eden, because they can not read the secrets of the Eternal."

"Do you really believe that the Stars are linked with us—that in their course we may read our fate?" I asked, as we stood still gazing upon the sky.

"I do. It may not be for us to read the scroll clearly. We may err in many things, for we are but as atoms, spelling with a broken alphabet the mighty book which was unrolled at the creation; but to the humble and reverential inquirer, there is enough of light and knowledge given, to enable him to unveil many secrets of the dim and mysterious future."

"Were there ever men who could do this?"

"Oh, yes. In the older ages of the world,

when men's minds were simpler, and their faith was more earnest, there were many, who, living apart from doubt and sin, became rich in this lore; and it needs but to lead their life of studious and reverential research, for us to read as they did."

These words sank into my mind, feeding its secret superstitions. I looked up into the transparent depths of the universe, outspread above me, and strove to penetrate its profound mysteries. Angel eyes seemed watching me from every radiant orb, and it required but a small effort of fancy to imagine myself in the presence of those glorious spirits to whom the charge of God's earthly children is given.

As I gazed, a bright, pale amber star suddenly shot like a meteor into the depths of space.

"Look, Mr. Lyle, look!" I exclaimed, pointing to it, "that is my Star; the one I have told you of. See how bright it is! Now—how it seems to tremble—and now see how dim it has become. What does that foretell?"

"Sorrow, Florence! If that is the Star of your destiny, you will have a stormy life, my child. Alone; ever alone, that Star portends struggle and woe."

"And triumph?" I asked, in a deep but not tremulous voice; for my heart ever rose in danger.

"Yes, in part. But there needs more than a glance at the heavens to tell you all that is written there, Florence."

"Can you—will you read it for me? If my destiny is sorrowful, will not the knowledge of what *may* be, help me to avoid and shun danger?"

"Perhaps. I must think of it. The treasure-house of knowledge is not to be laid open to every eye. The Stars are often fatal books."

"Not to me: oh, no, not to me! From my infancy I have lived apart from others; never understood, and little loved. My heart has ached for sympathy, and I have been met with misapprehension. No one has seemed to value me, or believe me capable of affection and tenderness. I have been nursed as if for the storm and the sacrifice, and now that the very Stars, with their everlasting voices, pronounce the same destiny, I pine to know how it is ordained that suffering shall come. I want to see my fate, and grow familiar with it. Little things cast great shadows in the twilight, and I may wear myself away in fearing small sorrows, and fancying phantoms to be realities."

"Poor child! poor child!" exclaimed the old man, tenderly; "no phantoms are these sorrows, which the Stars shape out for you."

"Are they to be overcome? or must I die in the struggle? Oh! Mr. Lyle, tell me—tell me all."

"What is best for you to know, I will, Florence; for I love you better than any thing on earth—except the memory of my lost child; and I will serve you as I would have served her, if God had spared her to need it. With this promise you must be satisfied."

And I was satisfied; for I saw that I had really won the love of that kind and good old man, and that I had found a friend where I had only seen a pleasant acquaintance. My friends have generally been among the aged. There is something in their wise and passionless calmness that has always been inexpressibly delightful.

me. Few things have so great a charm for me as the conversation of cheerful and kind old people: one listens with reverence to their experience; learning lessons of wisdom from their lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE hackneyed saying that there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, may perhaps explain why it is, that, with more than a common share of veneration for dignity and greatness, both in men and things, I have at the same time such a keen appreciation of the ridiculous. An instance of the close connection between the extremes of terror and the ludicrous, occurred a few nights after the conversation which I have related in the last chapter.

Forest Home was a large and rambling old mansion, so closely surrounded by trees that in many places huge limbs of elm and oak grated against the very walls. The night of which I am going to speak, was dark, cold, and rainy; the wind blew furiously, as if it had been winter, and we all drew round the large wood fire in the dining-room, with a full sense of its comfort.

The evening waned into night, as we sat listening to Mr. Lyle's pleasant stories, pausing at times as the heavy gusts of wind swept through the forest with a surge-like roar, making the trees creak and groan, and the branches of those near the house jar and scrape against the walls.

"I could fancy those sounds were the wailing of spirits in distress," said our host, as we hearkened to the rushing and moaning of the blasts.

"Yes, it is just upon such a night as this that legends say they wander over the scenes they knew in life. Hark! one could almost declare that was the voice of a Banshee," cried my mother.

"Why, some people do believe that this house is haunted, and that at certain times there are terrible sights to be seen by those who are bold enough to watch; but I have never been fortunate to see or hear any of them."

He stopped suddenly, for, proceeding as it were from the depths of the forest, and swelling louder and louder as it neared the house, came a most fearful and unearthly wailing. Nothing that I have ever heard can give an idea of the sound. It was appalling. We all except Mr. Lyle started to our feet, and grasped the nearest thing to us, as if for protection. It seemed that when the cry reached the house it stopped, and for a few minutes all was silent.

"It is very strange!" said Mr. Lyle. "I certainly never heard any thing like—"

Again the fearful sound was heard; this time close to us. Helen, my mother, and I, clung together, too much terrified to speak. There was a large old room, generally unused, adjoining the north side of that in which we were now assembled; and all at once the cry appeared to come from thence. It was answered by a louder burst of wailing from without, accompanied with a *strange mysterious rustling*, which frightened *Helen and me dreadfully*. Then, after a short *silence, the noise came from the other side of the house, and echoed shrilly through the rooms and passages.*

"Surely this is some trick," said Mr. Lyle, "I will go and see if I can detect any thing."

In spite of our entreaties that he would not leave us, our host went out into the hall, where he was met by the three female servants and the coachman; the only domestics he employed, except a lad who was in training for a footman, and who had gone home this evening to see a sick mother.

"Oh, sir!" cried the party, as with one voice. "What will become of us? Do you hear the sperrits?—There!—Oh, Lord!" and as they spoke the shrill unearthly moaning struck us again with inexpressible terror.

There were innumerable passages in the house intersecting each other in various directions; and even as Mr. Lyle walked through them the wailing seemed to accompany him; sometimes shrieking close before him, sometimes moaning and dying away in the distance. It sounded inside as well as out; and was at times attended with a rushing noise, as if some heavy body were moving through the air: the inexplicable cause of which rendered the effect appalling. When after an hour's search Mr. Lyle came back to us, looking pale as a spectre, and declared that he could discover nothing, we all, servants and guests, clung to each other, as if numbers and proximity gave security.

In this manner we spent the night, the supernatural noises still continuing at intervals: but when morning dawned, and the gray light came in through the chinks of the shutters, the cries ceased. Then, persuaded by our host, whose distress at our alarm was very great, we all went into my mother's room to get some rest: some upon chairs, others on the floor, but Helen and I on the bed with her. We only felt safe when the morning light filled the room, and found us all together.

After a few hours' restless sleep, we all met in the breakfast room the next morning, and traces of the night's terrors were apparent in the countenance and manner of each. Every one looked pale and apprehensive, making nervous attempts at cheerfulness and ease, which were complete failures. Generally speaking, daylight and sunshine dispel all superstitious fears: one can not think of ghosts where every corner is radiant, and closets are only shady. But it was not so with us; for though the day was unusually brilliant, and the air musical with the songs of summer birds, the shrill and piteous wailing of the night, and the mysterious rushing as of winged spirits, still sounded in our ears.

After an uncomfortable breakfast, just as Mr. Lyle was quitting the room, my mother said,

"Will you forgive me for leaving you to-day? I have received a letter from Captain Sackville, saying that he intends going to Ingerdyne next week, and there are many things that I should like to superintend before his arrival. He also begs me to try and induce you to return with us, and spend a few weeks in H—shire."

"No, no; I can not leave home until I have discovered this mystery. I did hope that you would not have deserted me for a day or two at least, while we made inquiries: but you must please yourself, my dear. I shall only be a little more lonely, and I can not expect you to make yourself uncomfortable for my sake; so go, my dear, go."

There was something so melancholy in the old man's voice, that, excited by sympathy and the glowing sunlight into a temporary fit of courage, I exclaimed,

"I will stay: may I, mother? I am not afraid; and I can't bear to leave Mr. Lyle alone in this dismal haunted old house."

"You, Florence! why you are the greatest coward in existence: you trembled last night after you had fallen asleep. You would die with fear when Helen and I were gone," replied my mother.

"Well then, will you stay, mother dear, for a day or two, that we may try and find out the secret? Do not leave Mr. Lyle by himself. Suppose you make a bargain with him, that we will stay till the day after to-morrow, and if he has discovered nothing then, he will come with us to Ingerdyne?"

After much discussion, this arrangement was agreed to. My mother evidently disliked it, although she could not well refuse her assent, when asked in the way I had put it: besides, to any one as well acquainted with the Ingerdyne *ménage* as Mr. Lyle, it seemed too absurd for her to play the dutiful wife and anxious house-keeper.

As soon as the day of our departure was settled, we all set out in a body upon a tour of investigation; but, unfortunately, just as we reached the hall, some neighbors, whose promised visit we had forgotten in the excitement, drove up to spend the day. All our plans for prosecuting the search were now at an end; for Mr. Lyle naturally shrank from making his house a subject for gossip, and we of course could not but respect our host's wishes and feelings.

I think I never spent a more weary day. It seemed a week long. Do as I would, I could not shake off the thought of the last night, nor the dread of the coming one; I longed with all my heart for these visitors to go, and yet I shuddered at the thought of the dreary silence and dismay which must fall upon us when they were gone. I wanted to talk to Mr. Lyle and ask a thousand questions, though I knew the answers must be that he had discovered nothing; yet I feared to take one of the many opportunities that offered, lest people might suspect what we were talking about.

How foolish, and yet how common is this feeling: when one subject thus engrosses all our thoughts, and arouses our apprehensions, we fancy that the secret is betrayed by our actions, and that every one reads it in our faces. We brood upon some one thing until the whole world seems instinct with it, and we fancy that others, who have no key to our thoughts, see in all we do the hidden mystery which is to us so palpable. We talk idly, and start to find that even thus we have hovered like the bird about her nest, and tremble to think that our secret is betrayed. What is so important to us we can not persuade ourselves is nothing to others. It wounds our self-love to think that it should be so; and yet, inconsistent as we are, we are alike distrustful of the security of indifference, and the curiosity of interest. It never occurred to me that the other guests, not being possessed of the powers of divination, could not suspect any thing unusual in my speaking apart with Mr. Lyle;

and so, instead of relieving my mind by asking him at once what I longed to know, I went on wondering and watching till I could neither ask nor answer any thing properly.

Evening came at length. The deep, long shadows cast from the forest trees lay upon the ground; but to us the scene had lost its beauty, and what had hitherto been so lovely, now seemed gloomy and portentous. At last the visitors, somewhat puzzled (as they well might be) at the manner of their reception, drove off, and we were alone. Nothing had been done toward solving the mystery; and now that night was approaching we all felt a sinking of the heart, and a wish to keep together, very significant of the alarm of each.

Twilight was fading, and there was no moon; so it was a matter of anxious although tacit consideration with each of us, whether we should order candles or sit in the waning light. The dusk of evening, usually such a pleasant time, looked this evening almost terrible; still, while the windows were open, we need not fancy the night had quite closed in. Lights would be cheerful, but they would too plainly show that the day and its protection had passed. We sat mute and abstracted, Mr. Lyle and my mother endeavoring to sustain a disjointed conversation, which every now and then lapsed into silence: it was evident that neither was thinking about what was said.

In one of these pauses the turret clock struck ten. The iron clang sounded through the stillness like a knell. Helen seized my hand, and I felt that hers was cold as marble. Night seemed to have thrown her dark mantle suddenly over the scene, and Mr. Lyle, assuming a tone of indifference, said,

"We will have candles: it is getting dusk, I fancy." As if the idea had only just occurred to him, and we had not all been thinking of it for more than an hour.

It was now dark as midnight, with a stormy sky, and neither moon nor stars. Mr. Lyle rose to ring the bell; but, before its summons died away, a heavy rushing swept past the open window, and the wailing of the night before was repeated. A loud cry of terror broke from Helen, as she sprang from her seat, and clung to her mother, while I leaned against the table, my heart beating violently.

At this moment the door opened, and lights were brought in by the lad who had been from home the night before. He was very awkward and fussy, and, putting down the tray with the candles on it, proceeded to shut the windows, seeming to take no notice of our alarm.

Just as he had unloosed the last curtain, the cry again pierced the silence; but this time close by, as if at the door. Helen fell back in her chair, fainting with alarm. Mr. Lyle started, and his eye fell upon the boy, who was hurrying away.

"Stop," said he, in a loud clear voice, which made us all look up; you know something of this, I see: what is this noise?"

The lad stood still, looking pertinaciously upon the carpet.

"Answer me: what is this noise?"

The boy made no reply. Again the wailing cry was heard.

"If you do not speak at once, I will send John

off for a constable, and have you put into the cage till you do."

"I'm sure, sir, I didn't think no harm," began the boy, stammering. He could get no further.

Mr. Lyle stretched out his hand to the bell, saying,

"I shall ask you no more questions: you know the consequences of disobedience."

Fortunately this insinuation was sufficient. The lad knew well that Mr. Lyle never threatened without performing; and having once spent a night in the cage during the last fair (when he was locked up by the sapient constable in mistake for another person), he had a sufficient knowledge of its discomfort to shun the danger of a second visit. Accordingly, with much circumlocution of rustic speech, he explained the mystery.

It appeared that late the evening before, he had determined to rob an owl's nest, which he had discovered in one of the large old trees in the forest. The young ones were ready to fly, and fearing to leave them for another day, lest they should abscond from their paternal roof-tree, he secured them at once, and lodged them, safely and secretly as he thought, in an old cage in the chimney of the dark unused room before spoken of. Somehow or other the fledglings got out, and commenced flitting and screaming along the passages, while the old birds wandered round and round the house, crying for their imprisoned brood. When the boy came back and heard from his fellow-servants their horrible account of the last night's terrors, he at once suspected the cause; especially as he found stray feathers lying about the hall and lobby: but, as he could nowhere find the birds, he hoped they had escaped; and therefore kept his own counsel.

"And where are the birds now, sir?" asked his master, sternly: "they are in the house still, or the old ones would not hover about it in this way."

"Please, sir, I put 'em in the cage in the chimney, again; and they're not got away, for I heard 'em screeching in the hall when I come in just now."

"Go and bring them here instantly."

In a few minutes the boy returned, and a prolonged peal of laughter greeted his appearance. We had been endeavoring to teach him to wait properly, and one of the maxims most carefully impressed upon his memory, was to bring in *every thing* upon a waiter. In obedience to this rule, he now entered carrying a huge tray at arm's-length, upon which, sliding from side to side of the smooth and slippery surface, were two young white owls!

Anything more ridiculous can not well be conceived. The solemn birds seemed trying in vain to keep up appearances; winking and blinking at the light, and shaking their feathers (which operation dislodged a great quantity of soot), while they slid to and fro upon the tray, maintaining a gravity of look which was perfectly irresistible. The boy, too, covered with soot, and staring with wonder and fear, while vainly endeavoring to keep the tray still and pacify the birds, completed the drollery of the scene.

Poor Solomon—for that was his unlucky name—stared first at us and then at the owls; then brought the tray to a level, and appeared about

to address us—the birds looking all the time as sedate and solemn as judges on the bench; but every time just as his mouth opened, away went the creatures staggering and sliding about their slippery platform again.

At last, in a fit of desperation, provoked by the efforts of the owls and our continued peals of laughter, the boy shook the tray viciously, and down came the birds scuffling and fluttering upon the floor. Bursting with rage, as the birds took great hops about in different directions, the boy darted furiously on his prey, and at last, after many random plunges, succeeded in catching them; when, driven half frantic with our peals of laughter, he rushed out of the room in a frenzy.

Such was the ludicrous solution of the seemingly inexplicable cause of our terrors; and to this day I never think of those solemn owls with their sooty plumage reeling and sliding about on the tray, without indulging in a burst of laughter very perplexing to any unenlightened companion.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE last of the happy days spent at Forest Home now arrived: we had all received an invitation from a neighbor, a very old friend of my mother's, to spend it with her; and she had assembled a gay young party to meet us. But in the morning I was suffering from one of my torturing headaches, and, therefore, unable to go; and Mr. Lyle having excused himself, on the ground of business, Helen and my mother went alone.

Toward evening I became better, and left my room to enjoy the fresh air in the cool shade of the elms. Presently, I was joined by Mr. Lyle; and we staid out of doors until the heavens were gemmed with stars.

But the night, though bright, soon grew very chilly; and we then adjourned to a large oak-paneled chamber, fitted up with massive furniture of the same carved, polished wood. It was lighted by two windows, which opened to the ground, and looked out upon the forest. Opposite to them was a huge sideboard, upon which was now placed a large shaded lamp, that only lighted a portion of the room, leaving the rest in a pleasant gloom; shrouded in which Mr. Lyle and I sat gazing upon the scene through the open windows. For a long time neither of us spoke; but at last I broke silence by saying:

"You promised to tell me something of the future; let it be to-night."

"No, Florence. The future is a dark page even for the happiest: it is not fit that the curtain which shrouds it should be lifted up."

"Why not? I have courage to bear any thing but uncertainty. My heart tells me that my life will be full of sorrow and strife, and I long to know what shape the trials will take, that I may be ready for them when they come."

"You have a brave spirit now, Florence, and it may be sufficient for the need; but remember that it has never yet been tried. How do you know that you will not be helpless when the time of trial comes?"

"Because I feel that, although I might die under suffering, I should not give up. While I have life, I shall strive on."

"But poverty, Florence; loss of position, degradation; how could you bear those?"

"Is it so?" I asked, mournfully, as if my doom were about to be revealed: "my fears have long taken that shape. For many months, I have felt a strange conviction that every day was bringing some terrible change nearer and nearer. Well, I am glad I *know*, instead of *fear* it."

"Glad! Ah, Florence! you have no idea what poverty is."

"No; although I soon shall. But my mother, and Helen: what will become of them? It seems to me that they will sink under trouble; Helen especially. What can be done for them?" I asked, as if already preparing for inevitable reverses.

"There are the same resources for them as for you, I imagine—exertion and endurance."

"Alas! Helen has neither; and my mother can endure, but not exert herself. Can you not tell me more? What am I to do? Is there no escape?"

"Ha! I thought you would soon ask that question. Is there not a proverb which says, that we are all brave in the daylight?"

"Yes; but you are wrong in the inference you would draw from it. I have no love for sorrow, grief, or trouble; no one will feel poverty more bitterly than myself: not, I think, for its wants, but for the slights and insults, the wounded feelings and broken friendships, which follow in its train. I am proud as Lucifer, and I shall quiver with anger and mortification at patronizing airs and insolence. I quite believe that I might die with rage and disgust under it; therefore, you see that I know pretty well the misery of a change of circumstances, and that I am neither fool nor Quixote enough to welcome it from any false idea of its benefits, or of the chance of my shining in it.

"If there be an alternative, I should like to know it. If, by going one way, I could escape the sorrows you tell me of, and by persisting in another I must meet them, I would prefer the safer path. But if not; if I must go on in a predestined course, be it so: I have faith in my power to bear and do."

"How old are you, Florence—exactly?"

"I was sixteen last December; it is July now."

"No more? You have a bold heart, and, I think, a true one. At sixteen, one does not look for heroines; but great needs often call forth great energies. It seems as if it would be so in your case."

"Will you, can you tell me what I ask? Must I go through this great trial?"

"I think so. But I would fain hope that I am wrong: when one's sympathies are deeply interested, it is easy to exaggerate dangers."

"Yes; but it is not so with me: my presentiments are strong, and they have foreshadowed this. But can you tell me no more?—nothing definite?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I must be content, then. It is something to know there is danger: I hate a false security."

For a long time we sat talking of the past and future, and the different courses taken by different people under suffering. There had

been a suicide in the village a few days before; and it was now well known that it had been committed by the unhappy man to escape from impending ruin.

"Of all the strange things done by men, suicide always appears to me the most perplexing. It is so difficult to decide whether it springs from cowardice or courage," said Mr. Lyle.

"Oh, surely from cowardice! And yet, if a man believes in a hereafter, it must be more than what is usually called bravery, that can nerve him to plunge into eternity."

"Yes; but it is not true courage. In my opinion, there is wisdom, as well as mercy, in attributing suicide to insanity. No man in the possession of all his faculties *could*, I think, commit suicide. People can not always judge of a man's sanity by his actions. The mind may be clouded and unable, upon many points, to reason truly; and yet the daily conduct, ay, even up to the very last hour, may be, to all appearances, perfectly rational. I remember a case of this kind occurring many years since, in which I knew all the parties well.

"The gentleman was a solicitor: we had been college friends, and, up to the day of his death, preserved our friendship intact. He married very early, and very unfortunately: his wife was a beautiful, extravagant flirt; a woman without either heart or principle: his fortune was large, but the way in which they lived would have ruined a man with twice his resources. They had two children, a son and a daughter, who grew up exactly as you might expect the children of such a mother would do. The daughter married early, and bade fair to follow her mother's example; the son was taken by his father into partnership as soon as he was out of his articles.

"Several times between that period and the close of his life, I visited my friend, but I never staid long; for I was too deeply grieved at seeing the change which had gradually come over him. He was silent and care-worn, moving about his splendid rooms and parties as if he were a stranger, and never appearing at ease except when engaged in his office with his clients and his papers. Once or twice, taking the privilege of old acquaintance, I ventured to remonstrate with his wife and son upon the reckless way in which they squandered his money; but the answers I received were such as effectually to prevent my ever venturing upon the subject again. All that I had imagined of heartlessness and blindness fell short of what their words and manner betrayed; so, as I could do no good, and could not endure to see a man thus crushed and ruined by an ungrateful family, I determined never again to visit at his house, unless I was absolutely compelled.

"I must tell you that he was my own lawyer, and had brought me through two very intricate Chancery suits, mainly by the exertions of his clear-headed and persevering abilities; indeed, I never found any man of business more acute and practical. He was a rare combination of quick perceptions and sound judgment.

"Well, a week before his death, he wrote to me, desiring that I would go to town to sign some papers, necessary to bring to a close a long and tedious business which he was conducting for me. I went, and although I expect

ed that the four years we had been separated would have made some alteration in him, I certainly was not prepared for the difference I found. He had not only aged considerably, but, except when in business, his manner was hurried and absent. He talked by fits; sometimes remaining silent and moody for an unusual time, then speaking rapidly, and laughing immoderately. All this grieved and shocked me; the more so, that I saw his wife and son either appeared unconscious of the change, or were indifferent to it.

"I reached London on the Wednesday, and that day, and every succeeding one till Saturday, was spent in going through long and perplexing law-papers, the real meaning of which I should never have discovered but from his perspicuous explanation.

"On Sunday I dined at his house, prior to my leaving town the next day. During dinner a most painful scene occurred between the father and son, relative to some partnership money, which had been received by the former, and which the latter fancied had not been accounted for satisfactorily. With great patience my friend strove to explain to his undutiful son how the matter stood, and, beyond all question, exonerated himself fully from the charge insinuated against him. But the young man chose to profess himself dissatisfied, and his mother took his part, with the most insulting and aggravating expressions.

"The forbearance of her husband was marvellous; but there was an unnatural composure and coolness in his manner that struck me with surprise. After dinner he left the table, having previously desired me to remain until the evening, upon the plea of further business. When tea was served, he came down stairs, and asked for a cup, which he was about to carry away; but, hearing his son say that he intended to leave the house shortly, he turned round, and addressing his wife, said, in a peculiar tone:

"Do not let your son go, Mrs. —: he may be wanted."

"Without waiting for a reply, he went back to his dressing-room. A feeling of restraint hung upon us all, though why, we could not tell; and immediately after the tea equipage was removed, I rose to go, first sending a servant to inquire if his master wished to see me.

"The man was absent some time, and at last came back looking very pale; he said that his master's room door was locked, and that he could not obtain admittance. My heart sank; and even his wife, although she tried to laugh, seemed frightened, and requested her son to go up-stairs and call his father. He did so, and so did I: but to all our appeals we got no answer.

"At last we resolved to break open the door, and upon doing so, there before us, sitting in a large arm-chair before the writing-table, was the lifeless form of my poor friend! One hand grasped a pistol, the other hung clenched by his side. He had shot himself through the mouth, and his brains were scattered over the ceiling and furniture. Upon the desk lay his watch, a sealed packet, and a paper, upon which was written, in a steady hand:

"This is the key of my desk. It is to be opened only by Mr. Lyle. Do not touch my body until the inquest has sat."

"The candle had been extinguished, the window curtains drawn, and every thing put carefully into its place: there was method and arrangement in the whole terrible scene. I was so shocked that it was long before I could bring myself to fulfill his direction and open his desk. But it was absolutely necessary for the satisfaction of the jury, and therefore I did so.

"His will, dated some years previously, was the first thing I saw: a long and carefully drawn out statement of his affairs, which was addressed to his son, and showed that the firm was nearly insolvent; and a clear account of the enormous expenses against which he had so long and vainly remonstrated, showing the effect they had had in bringing things to the present crisis. There were also several letters to old friends, and a few professional memoranda.

"Nothing in these papers betokened an unsettled mind: on the contrary, every thing was arranged with the care and skill of a sane and composed intellect. Yet the verdict of the jury was 'Temporary insanity;' and I never doubted the soundness of the conclusion to which they came.

"There was, however, a great outcry among a certain set, who declared that if the suicide had been a poor instead of a rich man, he would have had harsher dealing; but I felt that, although his faculties for business were clear, yet that domestic misery and embarrassed means had so clouded his perceptions of higher things, as to render him virtually insane upon the subject of escaping from them.

"Three months after, this was proved by the receipt of a large packet, which had been found among his papers, addressed to me. It was his diary: the daily record of his thoughts and sufferings for twenty-five years.

"It was painful but satisfactory to me to find, in reading it carefully through, how completely the mind of the writer was warped upon the subject of his responsibility after death, and his duty to God. The whole tone of the observations upon these weighty subjects was progressively more and more wild, extravagant, and insane: no one could have read them and believe that their writer was in full possession of his faculties when touching upon those topics; and it was strange to contrast the perfect clearness and soundness of his views upon every other subject, with his outrageous and desperate theories upon these.

"Home sorrows had made that man a lunatic; and, when he sat down to do the last awful deed of his life, he believed as firmly that he was only doing what he had a perfect right to do, as I do that I am right in denying it. And this bears out my firm opinion, that no man takes away his own life except under the influence of insanity: to all outward seeming he may be rational; but in the eye of God he is a mad-man."

"It is a shocking story. What became of his wife?"

"In a very few weeks after her husband she died also. A fall down stairs brought on fever, from which she never recovered, and in three months from the day of his death, she was laid beside him in the grave."

"Love, honor, and obey!" said I, musingly. "I wonder if she ever thought of those words?"

"I should think not: but, Florence, how few women do? You, for instance: when you marry, you will be a perfect tyrant, thinking no more of obedience, than you do now of wrinkles."

"I don't know. I hope I shall never marry: if I do, I shall make a strange sort of wife. But all will depend upon the man I am tied to."

"Why, what sort of Adonis have you imagined for yourself?"

"I can't tell. I never thought of it much, except to hope that I should never marry at all. Ingerdyne is not the best place to induce people to indulge in fairy dreams of married bliss."

"No. But you will marry: most girls do; and if they don't, they generally become sour and rigid. Of all the people I know, Florence, you would make the most disagreeable old maid. You need love, and all its softness, to make you bearable. I think you would be a pattern wife, but a most terrible maiden aunt."

I laughed and rejoined—"Well, it must be some time before I can strike terror into the hearts of any juvenile nieces or nephews, seeing that Helen is only fifteen yet. Nevertheless, I shall certainly be that formidable person some day; for she is much more likely to get an offer than I am. Even now, all the gentlemen like her much better than they do me."

"Not all: I do not."

"You! no; nor did Sir Hugh Danvers; nor does Mr. Comberton: but all young men I mean."

"Very likely: you liked dolls once; but wise men seldom choose a girl like Helen for a wife. With all your faults, Florence, you are far more fitted for that dignity than your sister. You would help your husband, she would hamper hers. You will never be half so handsome as Helen, nor so attractive in manner; but men will honor and esteem you, when they will only compliment and admire her. You need not be jealous of your sister."

"Jealous of Helen! Oh, Mr. Lyle, what have I done that you should think me capable of such meanness? It would be false to say that I would not give half my life to be loved as she is, with her winning graceful beauty: but I do not envy her, nor am I jealous. I should be only too grateful to be prized like Helen; but it is not my fate, and I must be content: only it grieves me to hear my mother and some other people say that I have no heart. I know—I am sure—that I have as warm a heart as Helen's, only I can not talk about it: nor can I love every body."

"Content yourself, Florence: you will have few friends, but they will be firm ones. Those who love you, will love you for life; and they will make up, in their constancy, for a host of butterfly admirers."

"I must give you one caution, however. Like all impulsive and ardent natures, you are captious: you will not love many, but upon those you do love, you will lavish your whole heart, and expect the same in return. Be reasonable; all have not the same capacity for loving: some may love you truly, faithfully, unto death; but they may not always show it in the way you would choose; do not, on that account, doubt their affection. You have a large

capability for love; others may have but a small one: yet they, like you may equally give their all. Do not forget this, Florence; for I foresee that you will often suffer unnecessarily from this cause. At such times remember what I have now said to you, and be *reasonable*."

The next day my pleasant visit to Forest Home was ended; and even now, after the lapse of many years, I look back to it as one of the happiest periods of my life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE week after our return from Forest Home; my father came down from London, bringing with him several gentlemen of the usual stamp, and among the rest an extravagant young baronet, who was about to marry an heiress, the orphan daughter of an army contractor.

During their stay, several gentleman's dinners were given, and the house was in a constant state of confusion. Inexperienced as I was, the expense of these visitors made me uneasy, and I wondered that my mother was not alarmed for the consequences; but it was so great an object with her to keep my father in a good temper, that whatever misgivings she might have had, she would not, for the sake of peace, mention them to him.

It is not easy for a girl, however strong may be her conviction that her parents are doing wrong, to venture to speak to them upon the subject, or to take an independent step. She may sympathize, or even assist them when called upon; but unasked, how can she volunteer an opinion, or obtrude a remonstrance? I was certain that double the income arising from my father's pay, and the Ingerdyne property, would be insufficient for the establishment maintained there, and the habits in which he indulged, and I became more firmly convinced every day, that such a course could end in nothing but ruin. Yet how was I to avert it? What could I do? I had no friend to whom I could impart my fears; not one with whom I could take counsel: therefore, whatever were my feelings or fears, I was compelled to be silent.

It was within my own knowledge that bills were presented over and over again, without receiving payment; and whenever I asked my father for my allowance (which was now sadly in arrear) he threw himself into a passion, and told me to get what I wanted at the shops, but not to tease him for money.

All this made me wretched at times: but it is not in human nature for a girl, of little more than sixteen, to pine and fret for extravagances which she can not prevent, and of which she is reaping the comforts; nor to keep her eyes fixed upon a gloomy future, when older and wiser people seem perfectly at their ease.

In the August of this year Sir Wallace Mowbray (the baronet I have before spoken of) was married, and he and his bride came to spend their honeymoon at Ingerdyne.

I do not think I ever disliked any woman more than I did Lady Mowbray. She was very rich, and very aspiring, and had married Sir Wallace wholly for his rank: her heart had no more to do with the contract, than if she had been a Geese

gian slave. And, for that matter, the bridegroom was not an atom more disinterested: since it was but too apparent that he had married her for her money. It was a match of self-interest on both sides.

Lady Mowbray had been under the guardianship of her uncle, a penurious old country brewer, at whose house she seldom saw any one more captivating than his clerks and customers; and, having been "finished," as it is termed, at one of those fashionable schools where the pupils graduate in frivolity, display, and assumption, she resolved to take the earliest opportunity of escaping from the dullness and thralldom of her uncle's house, by accepting the offer of the first man who could give her what she coveted—rank, station, and independence.

At a country ball, to which she went under the protection of the mayor's wife, she met and danced with Sir Wallace Mowbray. He was looking out for a rich wife, as she was for a titled husband, and after a very short acquaintance, he proposed, and was accepted. Neither of the parties was deceived: both Sir Wallace and his bride knew full well for what each had chosen the other; and they pursued their several courses as fancy and taste dictated.

Yet, as far as personal appearance went, there was quite enough in both to have created mutual admiration. Sir Wallace was an exceedingly handsome man, with a frank and courteous manner; while Lady Mowbray with her elegant figure, deep blue eyes, fair Saxon hair, and *gentle-seeming* manner, was decidedly the belle of the county.

It surprised every one that, with all these personal attractions, the bride and bridegroom should have been so perfectly indifferent to each other. Nor did I know the reason till long afterward, when a visit of several months in their house let me into the secrets of its owners; and the catastrophe which then occurred, made private histories public.

To my great surprise and vexation, Lady Mowbray took a violent fancy to me, and tormented me, and persuaded my mother, into consenting that I should accompany her ladyship to Mowbray to spend the autumn. My father urged it too; and although I disliked the bride exceedingly, yet I was not proof against the allurements she held out, as a reward for my compliance; so at last I consented to go.

It was early when we reached Mowbray, and as the carriage dashed in through the lodges, the first genuine smile of pleasure I had ever seen upon the bride's face, broke over it. In a minute we reached the entrance; for the park lay upon the other side, and we had only to pass through a small portion of the pleasure-grounds to reach the portico.

The village-bells were ringing merrily, and when the carriage stopped, and the servants let down the steps, Sir Wallace handed out his bride, and as she set foot upon the marble steps exclaimed, in a rather proud voice, "Welcome to Mowbray!" The principal domestics were *ranged* under the portico and in the hall, and I *observed the glance of exulting satisfaction which the new lady cast over the whole.*

My father and I followed, and upon entering the house I was greatly attracted by the appearance of a beautiful girl, little more than my own

age, standing in the centre of the hall. As we approached, she came forward, and in sweet, musical tones exclaimed, as Sir Wallace had done scarcely a moment before, "Welcome to Mowbray!"

Lady Mowbray bent gracefully to the salutation, but turned an inquiring glance upon her husband, who shook hands eagerly with the unknown, saying, "Thank you, thank you, Milly! you do the honors admirably. Now let me introduce you to my wife, for I really don't think she has heard of you before—shame for me to say so! but you must both forgive me. Agnes, this is my cousin Milly, a cherished guest of my father's and mine. You must love her for my sake, now; when you know her better, you will love her for her own."

A cloud passed over Lady Mowbray's countenance. She smiled and bowed, however, but did not speak; she was evidently surprised and annoyed. She had come to her husband's house expecting to reign there supreme, and alone; and lo! upon its very threshold, she had met a rival. She had not calculated upon this, nor could she think of allowing it; this beautiful, bright young cousin must go.

I read all this in her face, as she smilingly followed Milly into the drawing-room, and in the expression of her eye, as it fell upon the work-table and easel which stood by a window.

As we were much too early for dinner, Milly proposed to show me the house and grounds, while their new mistress rested; and accordingly we sallied forth.

It was a beautiful place, one of the most complete in the county. The hall was long, rather than square, and lighted by a domed skylight. The door by which we had entered was approached by a flight of white marble steps, and shaded by a portico; opposite to it at the other end of the hall, were large folding doors of glass, opening to the park and lake, both of which were seen immediately upon coming in from the front entrance. Right and left were the doors of the principal reception rooms; the smaller ones lying beyond them, and being connected with the rest by short, wide passages. In the centre of the hall was a richly carved oak staircase, leading to a spacious corridor or gallery, hung with family portraits; into which opened the bed-chambers, floored with polished oak.

The room appropriated to me was a lofty and spacious apartment wainscoted with cedar, the hangings of yellow damask. Magnificent pier-glasses extended from ceiling to floor beside the bed and between the windows, and large mirrors filled the panels of the chimney-piece. Altogether, the room had the appearance of an antique state bed-chamber, and I confess that when I thought of occupying it alone, the idea was not very pleasant; and I said so. My companion only laughed good-naturedly, and opening a concealed door by the side of one of the mirrors, replied,

"See, this short passage leads to my territory, which was formerly one of the two dressing-rooms attached to this bed-chamber; so whenever you have a visit from the family ghost, you have only to open this door, and claim such protection as I can give you; between us, we can surely frighten Sir Rannulph back to his frame."

"Oh! I wish you would allow it always to remain open; for, besides the security it offers in case of a supernatural visitor, it would be delightful to feel in this great place that one had a companion so near."

"I shall never fasten it, unless you wish it; but I fear you will be disappointed in my companionable qualities. I have never been from Mowbray since I came here when I was eight years old, so I shall not be a very amusing person, you see."

"Do you always live here?"

"Yes; mamma is a cousin of Sir Wallace, and when papa died we came here, and have remained ever since. Indeed, poor mamma is such an invalid that she could not remove."

I was surprised; for during the visits he had paid to Ingerdyne, both before and after his marriage, I had never heard Sir Wallace mention these inmates of his house. If he had been equally reserved with his bride, she had certainly ample cause for complaint.

"You seem surprised," said Milly; "did you not know we were here? Did Wallace never speak of us?"

"Never."

"Of course, Lady Mowbray knew?"

"Possibly; but she never named the subject to me."

"I hope she did know. Surely Wallace can not have deceived her, or mean to break his word to mamma. Oh, no, he can not intend to do that!" she said, half indignantly.

I was about to reply, when the dressing-bell warned us that there was no time to delay, if we intended to present ourselves at its last summoning to the dinner-table; therefore, as I had to unpack a trunk before I could dress, I was obliged to break off the conversation.

On entering the drawing-room, I found that, in addition to Sir Wallace, Lady Mowbray, my father, and Milly, there were three gentlemen assembled; one of whom, Mr. Edward Bellair, had just been defeated in his canvass for the borough of H—, and had, besides, lately written a novel; both of these circumstances made him just then something of a lion.

He was a slight and rather elegant looking young man, with a profusion of dark hair and whiskers, very small feet, and hands as white and delicate as a girl's; for all of which he entertained a most profound admiration. He spoke in a drawing, affected tone, and had a particular fancy for leaning against the chimney-piece, and tapping his bright little boots with a cane. He seemed at all times to consider himself the centre of attraction; the person upon whom all eyes must be fixed; and altogether he was a man whose presence never failed to remind one of the classic legend of Narcissus.

It was my fate—privilege he thought it—to be handed in to dinner by this exquisite, and to my great amusement he patronized me excessively. He did not appear to know who I was, whether a sister of the bride, or poor cousin of the host—nor would the knowledge have made the smallest difference in his manner; it suited him to be condescending, and I served that purpose as well as any body else.

During dinner he took some little trouble to explain to me the names and merits of the different dishes, for which information I expressed

so much gratitude, that a faint idea once seemed to cross his mind, that he was being quizzed. But it was too ridiculous to be entertained for more than a moment; and as I tried, the instant I detected his suspicion, to look as innocent as possible, he resumed his previous manner, and continued his gastronomic discourse. As the dessert was being placed on the table, he asked me, looking languidly at Milly—

"Who is that excessively natural person opposite, with those excruciating ringlets?"

"Milly."

"Ah! very good; but I suppose she's not a housemaid, and therefore has a surname; pray, what is it?—Jones?"

"Perhaps; I really can not tell."

"Ah, I see, you are not *au fait* yet in the domestic arrangements. Some poor relation of my lady's, I dare say. What a nuisance that must be! I should die of it."

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed; "only consider the loss to the world! rather exterminate the whole race of poor relations at once!"

"Ah, you flatter me!"

A bouquet of flowers, which Milly had given me when I came in to dinner, lay beside my plate, and to hide the laugh which quivered on my lip, I was obliged to bury my face in it. Talk of woman's love of flattery! it is nothing to man's. Only find out a man's weak point, and he is at your mercy; there is no amount of flattery that, if carefully administered, he will not imbibe; and, no matter how barefaced it is to others, he will believe in it, with a faith that is truly edifying.

For the first few days of our arrival, Mowbray was besieged with visitors; and, if there be any truth in looks and smiles, all were delighted with the bride, while she, to all superficial observers, appeared to enjoy her new position thoroughly. But to me there was an evident dissatisfaction and restlessness in her manner, which showed that something was wrong; and, though scarcely married six weeks, she and her husband were as civilly indifferent to each other, as if they were but the chance acquaintance of a day, to part again the next.

Milly was the only creature in the house whom I liked; but even in her position there was something I could not comprehend. Beautiful in person, gentle in manner, and highly educated; with a heart tender as an infant's, but nevertheless resolute and fearless in following her ideas of right, Milly was uncompromising in her reprobation of mean thoughts and unworthy deeds, and full of generous and noble impulses. I never knew any one more lovable, or more worthy of love than she was then.

Her mother, Mrs. Trevelyan, was a confirmed invalid, fading slowly and painfully away. During the last eight years she had never left her room; and she had scarcely strength in her attenuated frame to lift the flowers which her child brought to her in abundance; yet although she suffered acutely, no word of complaint, or murmur of impatience, ever escaped her lips. She was always cheerful and kind; a smile was ever upon her white and faded lips, and her voice was like the notes of a distant flute—sweet, musical, and low. After the first morning that Milly took me to her room, I spent much time daily with her; for there was to me

an irresistible charm in her holy conversation, and saintly endurance: besides that, she liked me, and encouraged my visits; and I, like every body else, am very prone to love those who love me.

One day, when I had finished reading to her the psalms of the day (which it was her daily practice to read or listen to), she told me her history.

She was a cousin of Sir Wallace Mowbray, the only child of his uncle, who had fallen while leading a forlorn hope in India. Her mother had died long before, and upon her father's death, old Sir George, the present baronet's father, had sent for her to his house, where she had lived until she married. Captain Trevelyan, like his wife's father, was a soldier, and nine years after his marriage was killed by a fall from his horse. He left very little property behind him, and Mowbray again became the refuge and home of the bereaved wife; who, in addition to herself, brought to her uncle's open arms, her little fairy-like namesake, Milly.

While Sir George lived, every comfort and consolation that the fondest affection and ample means could provide, were lavished upon the widow and her child; and when he died, he left her to his son's charge as a sacred legacy. Milly had always been the old man's pet and darling, and while her cousin was at college and abroad, she was so cherished and fondled that strangers always took her for the only child of his old age.

"It was a favorite hope of my dear uncle," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "that Wallace would marry Milly; and indeed, at one time, I thought his wish would be fulfilled, for after his father's death, though she was so young, Wallace never seemed happy away from her; and then I do believe she idolized him: but that is four years ago, and they have both grown older and wiser since."

"Why, how old is Milly? I thought she was about my own age."

"She is twenty; but she is as much younger than her age as you are older: no one, to hear you both talk, would imagine Milly was the eldest."

"It is my height which makes me appear so much older than I am. I wish I was like other people; I always feel so gigantic and awkward: certainly, tall women are great mistakes in creation."

"I think you are wrong, my dear: first, there can be no such thing as a mistake in God's creation; and secondly, tall women, if they are quiet and ladylike, are generally more admired than short ones. I agree with you, that if they are hoydenish, awkward, or childish, they are unpleasant; but there is no necessity for their being either, and I must say that I know but few who are so."

"May I never add one to the number!" I rejoined earnestly; for, if there is one thing more than another that I detest about myself, it is my height. It is to me a misery—yes, it well deserves the word—to find oneself moving in a kind of upper atmosphere, and to have people looking ostentatiously up at you, as if you didn't belong to them. Oh, the horror of entering a room in the dead calm of one's announcement, and passing through groups of reasonable-sized

creatures, to courtesy to the hostess, who makes you appear like a maypole; while she herself, perhaps, looks as if she had grown till about fifteen, and had then forgotten to go on! It makes one feel so much like the stork in the fable, when visiting the frogs.

I never see a very tall woman enter a room, especially if it is a small one, without being sorry for her; for, let her be naturally as self-possessed, even as elegant as she may, it is next to impossible for her to acquit herself gracefully: and her eagerness to occupy the first vacant chair, or the nearest couch, gives evidence of her discomfort. A tall woman in a large and lofty saloon, well filled with a numerous company of guests, may look in keeping with the rest; but in a small room, among a few people of average height, she is, certainly, an object of attraction, but not of admiration.

I remember, some years later in life than the time of which I am now speaking, going to a dance to meet, among others, a young Scottish bride, who was that night to be presented to her new relations. I did not arrive until late, and immediately on entering the room, I was seized upon by my hostess with a request, almost amounting to entreaty, that I would, with her son for my partner, make up a double quadrille, which was waiting for a couple.

Although I hate quadrilles—they are so formal and listless—there was in this case no alternative; so, taking my partner's arm, we made up the set by forming one of the side couples. Being engaged in conversation, I did not notice my *vis-à-vis* until I met her in the middle of the set. I was then first attracted by the vision of a lady's hand holding a bouquet, coming down to me, and on raising my eyes I almost started, for the owner of the hand stood before me, at least half a foot taller than myself, and some few years younger. She was girlishly dressed in white muslin, a broad crimson sash was tied behind, and a wreath of white roses, worn Norma fashion, stared all round her head. I never saw such a Brobdignag school-girl before; and to increase the grace of her appearance, she was most unproportionably slim.

Struck with astonishment, I stood involuntarily still. Happily, however, I recovered self-possession, without committing myself; but when the figure was concluded, I could do nothing but gaze upon the stranger, who I soon found was the bride. I looked up to her with grateful admiration; for she made me feel comfortable: satisfied with myself on the score of height. I was immediately conscious of a large acquisition of amiability; for I had found some one so much taller than myself, that I was glad to be in her company. I followed her about all the evening with the most persevering civility, and paid her so much attention, that my friends were quite surprised. Since then, whenever I am surrounded by small people, and feel myself too tall, I think of that lady, and am comforted.

But this is an unpardonable digression, having nothing to do with either Milly or her cousin, who, as Mrs. Trevelyan spoke, crossed the open ground before her window. I could not help observing,

"There is Sir Wallace walking with Milly: how well they look together! I almost wish his choice had fallen upon her."

"It is better as it is—much better; and Milly thinks so herself now."

I don't know what womanly discretion came to my aid, for the conversation had wonderfully enlightened my ignorance, and much that had never before struck me as strange, now assumed a new and significant aspect. Many things before inexplicable in Milly's conduct, and her cousin's, now appeared clear: I perceived, as if by instinct, that in his selfish, unsubdued love for her, lay the secret of his indifference to his wife; that the consciousness of his treachery to both had kept him silent upon the subject of her residence at Mowbray, and that misery lay like a gulf at their feet.

What Milly's feelings were I could not ascertain: at times I fancied that she was as indifferent to her cousin as he was to his bride; but then again some trifling occurrence seemed to disclose the secret of her heart, and showed his image there.

The dawning of these thoughts made me silent and uneasy, and I gladly embraced Mrs. Trevelyan's suggestion of a headache, to retire into my own room. I was far too young to see the full extent of the shame and sorrow which must follow the indulgence of the feelings I suspected; but I knew enough of the world to make me shudder with vague apprehension. Moreover, I loved Milly, and disliked her handsome and fascinating cousin; and I could not bear to think of evil befalling one so gentle and beautiful, from a man so unworthy of her regard.

These fears and fancies soon made my stay at Mowbray very irksome, and before I had been there three weeks I heartily wished myself at home; but my mother had promised Lady Mowbray that I should remain with her two or three months, and her ladyship would not release me.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL the wedding visits were now made and returned, and parties followed each other in rapid succession: night after night we were out; and I, who, like all young people, abominated great dinners, was condemned by my hostess to go through the weary routine of a set of country feasts.

I do think, after many years' experience of the various lesser miseries of life, that a regular dinner party is the most wearisome of all; especially in the country. The same dishes, the same people, the same dresses, the same stupidity, and the very same small talk, over and over again; the only change being in the name of your host and hostess, and the crest upon your fork.

Oh, these dreary dinners! Why can't English people, when they want to be particularly gracious, choose some other way of showing their intention, than by asking their friends to assemble at a long table, where they look formal, talk their heaviest, and eat and drink unusually. In no other country under heaven is eating and drinking made so grave and ceremonious a business as here. In England dinner is an institution: men can't go to a funeral, propose a revolution, support a charity, or change a vestry clerk, without a dinner.

Milly and I detested these tiresome, never-ending feasts; but Lady Mowbray never seemed to weary of them, nor of their solemn and inane pomp. As the bride, she was of course "the cynosure of neighboring eyes," and she received the homage paid her with a calm complacency that provoked me; for I knew how hollow was the idol which these hospitable people worshiped. She had thrown aside her early and oldest friends for these new ones, because the latter were a few degrees higher in the social scale; and it needed no prophet to foretell that they would in turn be given up, when the London season opened a more brilliant field for the exercise of her ambition.

Ah, Lady Mowbray! You certainly were wife to the owner of one of the oldest baronetcies in the land, with the jewels of a duchess, and the blazoning of a Plantagenet; but for all that, no poor woman who gathered stones in your husband's fields but might have scorned to change her honest heart for yours.

One little circumstance will illustrate her character. Sir Wallace, with all his faults, was generous and liberal; as his mortgaged estates and diminished acres even yet testified, although fifty thousand pounds of the fortune brought to him by his wife had been advanced by her guardian to release them.

One of his tenants was a gentleman farmer, whose ancestors had held land under the Mowbrays for more than three hundred years; his name was Herries. For the last two years—and for the first time in the annals of the estate that such a thing had happened in his family—Mr. Henry Herries was behindhand with his rent. He wrote to his landlord requesting forbearance, in consideration of past punctuality, and Sir Wallace readily promised that he should not be disturbed or annoyed.

Now it chanced that Mrs. Henry Herries was the daughter of a gentleman, at whose house Lady Mowbray, although received with distinguished courtesy, had failed in making the impression she desired; for Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster were people of the old school, and, both having in their youth held appointments about court, were not to be imposed upon by title and manner; and, being also shrewd judges of character, they easily detected the specious insincerity of their guest. The bride, who was not deficient in penetration, soon discovered this; and, although to all outward seeming she appeared pleased with her reception at Lancaster Court, there rankled ever after in her mind, a bitter feeling of hostility to the offenders.

About a week after this unlucky party, it came somehow or other to her knowledge that Mr. Herries was in arrear with his rent, and that his wife was the daughter of the obnoxious Lancasters, who had scarcely even yet forgiven their child for her marriage. Lady Mowbray eagerly seized this auspicious opportunity of revenging herself upon the Lancasters, and contrived to institute legal proceedings against the defaulter.

One day, while Lady Mowbray, Milly, and I were writing letters in the library, Mrs. Herries was announced. As neither Milly nor I knew any thing of the affair, we of course imagined that the visit was a usual morning call, and went on diligently with the business upon which we were employed, which was sending

out notes for a dinner and ball; while Lady Mowbray replaced her pen in the little gold inkstand, and received her visitor with unusual civility.

For some time I was so busy in addressing and sealing my billets, that I paid no attention to the conversation going on beside me; but at last the tremulous tones of Mrs. Herries's voice attracted my attention, and I looked up. She was sitting close to Lady Mowbray, tears were standing in her deep blue eyes, and her accents were low and hurried; her hands lay clasped upon her knee, and her face was flushed to crimson. Our hostess was as calm, smiling, and courteous as ever; her countenance showed no trace of sympathy or emotion. Just as I looked up she was saying,

"Do not agitate yourself: pray do not. I have no doubt Mr. Herries will be able to meet this trifling demand without any inconvenience."

"Indeed, it is impossible at present. I did hope that I had already sufficiently explained why, to your ladyship."

"Yes, yes, you fancy so; but I know how apt people are to magnify evils; and I dare say it is only necessary that Mr. Herries should speak to his banker, to set the whole matter quite right again. He would be vexed, I am sure, to see you annoy yourself about such a mere bagatelle."

Mrs. Herries looked with surprise in the face of the speaker. The bland smiling countenance belied the affectation of sympathy, and both words and tones were those of heartless mockery. She sighed deeply, and after a minute's pause, said,

"May I hope that your ladyship will kindly use your influence with Sir Wallace? He could refuse you nothing; and for the sake of my dear children, I plead to you, as no mere personal want or suffering could induce me to do for myself."

The tears which had till now hung upon her long eyelashes, fell silently over her hands; and, although her grief was deep and bitter, yet the simple dignity of her manner never forsook her.

"Florence," said her ladyship, not replying to the petitioner's request, "ring for luncheon: Mrs. Herries seems quite exhausted; and throw open that window, the air is too oppressive."

"Yes, yes," I said, hastily obeying her directions; "only pray, Lady Mowbray, attend to Mrs. Herries: she asked you something."

"Indeed! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Herries: but I am so heedless."

Heartless, I thought would have been a better word, but our visitor said,

"I only asked you, for my children's sake, to use your influence with Sir Wallace to prevail upon him to allow us a few weeks' delay, in paying the large amount of rent we are unhappily in arrear. I have told your ladyship how ill Mr. Herries is, and that he is unable to leave his room; indeed, there is danger to his life if he should be now harassed with such distressing business. If Sir Wallace proceeds to extremities, he certainly must be a heavy loser, as much of the stock upon the farm belongs to my father, who lends it to Mr. Herries. The Herries family have been exemplary tenants of the Mowbray estates for two hundred years, and have never, during that long space of time, caused the loss of a shilling."

"This is a plain statement for a man of business, and such as I should make to Sir Wallace. But to you, Lady Mowbray, a young, happy bride, I would plead my children. We are in your power; for Sir Wallace could not resist any petition offered by you. By the exercise of your influence now, the ruin which threatens us may be averted, your husband's interests protected, and an act of Christian charity performed. Dear lady! you will not, for want of one word of yours, doom us all to misery?"

"Will not Mr. Lancaster assist you?" asked the sweet, unmoved voice of Lady Mowbray.

"My father and mother left England three days since; and if Sir Wallace proceeds in the course he has commenced, before I could hear from them enough will have been done to disgrace my husband's name, and destroy his credit forever."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Herries, but when I married, I resolved never—"

"Oh, do not conclude! for mercy's sake, do not say what is on your lips!—Do not say that you have resolved never to help the unfortunate. Do not say you have resolved never to interpose between your husband's ill advisers and his own honor. Oh, Lady Mowbray, do not say this!"

"No, indeed; for I do not mean it. You are very eloquent, Mrs. Herries; and, forgive me if I say so, conjure up phantoms for the pleasure of showing us how gracefully you can do battle with them."

"You quite misunderstood what I was about to say. It was, that when I married, I resolved never to interfere in business affairs connected with estates, which are unhappily known to be heavily encumbered. But although I determined to avoid this, I did not intend to refuse myself the pleasure of assisting the poor, nor obtaining mercy for an unfortunate or needy tenant."

"I do not, however, see how your case comes within my province. It is a very large sum for Sir Wallace to lose, and I have no doubt that he well considered the steps he has taken, before he took them. His lawyer and steward are fitter people to speak to him upon the subject than myself: besides, in the present relative position of our affairs, it would be scarcely delicate in me to ask a favor connected with money matters."

"But in a case of life or death, surely a scruple of delicacy will give way! Your ladyship is every thing with Sir Wallace. Oh! do not send me away without a promise that you will do something in our favor. You say that you anticipate pleasure from obtaining mercy for your poor tenants; where can you find one more wretched than myself? Oh, Lady Mowbray! as you are a woman and a wife, do not let me sue to you in vain," and something of indignation mingled with the tearful voice of the petitioner.

My heart swelled till it threatened to choke me. I dared not speak, for I felt words of anger rising so fast to my lips, that to open them would have been dangerous; but my eyes flashed, and as their glare fell upon Lady Mowbray she read my thoughts.

She seemed conscious that she was not displaying her disposition in the most favorable

light, nor saying and doing what would look best in the eyes of the world, where she was so anxious to shine. She knew, also, that I was imprudent and fearless, held in awe by no mere rank or dignity; and had discovered that I was not to be bribed by smiles or compliments; that I had a habit of speaking plain truths; and, moreover, had no great love for her. Altogether, I was not just the person before whom she would wish to appear hard-hearted; so she said, with a smile,

"You need not look so like a Medusa, Flory, nor put me in bodily fear, by the lightning of those great eyes. I'm not going to do any thing so detestable as you imagine."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Herries, that you should have applied to me, because, to do as you wish, I must break a resolution which I made upon the advice of very old friends. Besides, I think Sir Wallace would have been the fittest person for you to have spoken to. Still, if you will come with me into my dressing-room for a few minutes, we will talk the matter over, and if I can help you, consistently with my duty to myself, I will."

Poor Mrs. Herries! how joyfully and full of hope she rose to follow her hostess; believing that, as she could do so much, she would. It would be a question worth asking, especially if there were any chance of obtaining a true answer, how often the will and the power to do good go together.

As soon as they were gone, Milly raised her head from the blank writing-paper, over which she had kept it bowed during the conversation which had just passed, and said, with an intensity of tone I could not have expected from one usually unimpassioned,

"God forgive me, Florence, but I almost hate my cousin's wife!"

Now, if I had been a good girl, I should have said—"I hope not, Milly: such a feeling is very wicked, highly improper," &c. And if I had been a wise one, I should have said, "Nonsense: nobody is worth hating, and it is a very troublesome thing to keep up hatred consistently." But I was neither; so I simply said,

"Almost! I do quite."

Milly stared, as much as any one so occupied with her own feelings could, saying,

"I thought you were friends."

"No; we never were, and never shall be. She took it into her head to get up a fancy for me while she was at Ingerdyne, for some reason which I have not yet discovered, and I came here in obedience to her invitation and my mother's wish. But I disliked her from the very first, and should have returned home long ago, if I had not found you here."

"Thank you, Florence. I am glad you have told me this; for you have often puzzled me. At times I have doubted your sincerity; for to feel as you speak, and to admire Lady Mowbray, appear to me inconsistent."

"Quite. No one can love candor and generosity, and love her ladyship too. The one feeling must destroy the other."

"Poor Wallace! He will rue this marriage bitterly, I fear. He who is so proud, and noble, and generous. What could have possessed him to choose such a wife! Better far to have shut up this great house and gone upon the Continent

for years, than to have tied himself for life to such a woman."

"So most rational people would think; but you and I, Milly, are not rational people."

"No; so it appears. I hope Lady Mowbray is not deceiving that poor Mrs. Herries by making her believe that she will serve her, when I am sure she has no intention of doing any such thing."

"I can not understand her behavior to-day at all. I thought she seemed pleased with Mrs. Herries when she met her at Lancaster Court; and to-day it is not difficult to see that, for some reason or other, she detests her. I can not make it out."

"As I have had the advantage of a month's longer acquaintance with her ladyship than you have, I can understand it all very well."

"Mr. and Mrs. Lancaster, being half a century in advance of the rest of the people about here, read Lady Mowbray's character at a glance—it is one, I suppose, they have been accustomed to in the world of a court—and their knowledge did not increase their admiration. But as her ladyship is no simpleton, whatever else she may be, she soon discovered their appreciation of her sweet smiles and honeyed flattery; and in proportion as she perceived that they knew her, she retorted by detesting them."

"Now, they are quite out of her sphere of mischief, and she is aware of it; but Mrs. Herries, their daughter, is in her power, and at her mercy. *Voilà!* the solution of the riddle."

"Can she be so mean?"

"Wait and see; meanwhile, say nothing. She is not omnipotent, though she is dangerous; and even if she plays this poor lady false, you can counterplot: speak to your cousin yourself, and get your mother to do so too."

"Mamma will not interfere between Wallace and his wife; and he refused a request made to him yesterday, because he said he had promised Lady Mowbray not to concede the point to any one: so there is little hope for Mrs. Herries from us."

"Nonsense, Milly, try! At the worst he can but say No; and if you manage properly, he will not say that. If he distresses those people, who are (for I heard him say so at Lancaster) the oldest tenants upon the estate, he will make himself thought unpopular in the county. Tell him that: no man likes to be unpopular; and if you are clever, you will save him, which I don't care about—and Mrs. Herries, which I do."

"Hark! what voices are those?" said Milly; "surely Mrs. Herries can not be going so soon?"

We both rose and went to the window. Under the portico stood Lady Mowbray and her guest; they were parting, and as they shook hands, the latter said,

"I may hope, then?"

"Certainly. I will make all the necessary inquiries, and, if I can serve you with propriety, I will."

"Have we wronged her, Florence?" asked Milly, as we watched her ladyship descend the steps, and walk out into the grounds: "surely she means well now?"

"She means 'to keep the word of promise to the ear, and break it to the hope.' There is no truth in her."

"But come, let us go out: we promised to ride to-day to Morley with that music for Jane Audley, and we shall only just have time if we set off now. I'll ring the bell, and order Stephen to bring the horses."

The expedition we were now contemplating had been undertaken to oblige our hostess, who was playing popularity with the owners of Morley Park, and had got some new songs from town expressly for the favorite daughter. No one was now staying at Mowbray but myself and two gentlemen, who were out shooting with Sir Wallace; consequently we were to go alone, escorted only by a groom.

CHAPTER XX.

It was half-past four o'clock when we left Morley on our return home, which was eight miles distant. It was about the middle of a singularly fine October, and although the early day had been as hot and clear as midsummer, the air had now become heavy and close.

Between us and Mowbray lay a wide extent of flat country, unvaried by a single hill, and only partially covered with vegetation: here and there clumps of trees relieved the monotony of large open tracts of waste land; but there was scarcely a house along the road.

It was a very cheerless landscape at any time, especially in the bleak winter. Just as we reached the border of this dreary piece of country, the sky, which had been overcast for some time, began to darken portentously, and the wind to blow "flash;" while the atmosphere became denser and oppressive, and the dust every now and then rose before us, as if caught up by a whirlwind.

"We shall have rain," said Milly, looking up at the leaden clouds.

"More likely thunder: the air is suffocating; and see how low the birds fly, and how uneasy our horses are. Will yours stand a storm, Milly? I never was out in one with Sancho; but I don't think he likes it."

As I spoke, a broad yellow sheet of light seemed to open the heavens before us from sky to earth, and a low muttered roll of thunder broke menacingly upon our ears. The horses started and plunged; but I had been upon my guard, and the tightened curb told Sancho that I was on the alert. As soon as he became quiet, I cast a look at Milly; she was pale as marble.

"What shall we do, Florence? We shall be killed if the storm lasts. Oh, do let us go back!"

"I wish we could; but I think we have left the most dangerous part of our journey behind, on account of the trees. What is the best thing to do, Stephen?"

"Go on, Miss, I think: we're only six miles now from home, and with your weight the horses ought to do that in less than half an hour. I can keep alongside Miss Milly, ready to help her if she gets frightened, if you think you can manage your horse, Miss."

"Do, Stephen. I think I can hold Sancho: at any rate I'm more used to him than Miss Milly is to her horse, and you can not help us both."

I leaned forward, patted Sancho's neck, talked

to him, and tried to coax him into amiability; but it would not do: his ears were laid back, and he bent his head low, almost pulling the reins out of my hand; he stamped impatiently, and uttered a low, angry neigh, seeming altogether disposed for mischief.

"I hope you're not timorous, Miss," said Stephen; "for your horse don't look particular steady."

Before I could reply, we were wrapped, as it were, in fire: and a tremendous peal of thunder, as if a hundred loads of stones had been upset upon a hollow floor above us, reverberated over our heads.

Sancho suddenly sprang forward with a bound, then stood still, trembling violently; and before I could well resettle myself in my saddle, he was off at full speed, the bit between his teeth, and his ears laid close to his small, sleek head.

About a mile on the road, a cart-way crossed it at right angles; the turning to the left leading over a dangerous country broken by chalk-pits and lime-kilns. As we neared it, I observed with consternation that Sancho bore so strongly to that side, as to make it more than probable he would rush down the first opening he came to on the left; which must take me into dangers I shuddered to think of.

With all my strength, I tried to stop, or guide him; but the curb was unheeded. I turned my head to see if Stephen and Milly were near, but I was alone: no horse in the Mowbray stables could keep up with my fleet thorough-bred steed, going, as he was now, at racing speed.

Night seemed to have closed in prematurely, and the road was only visible by the frequent and vivid lightning. The large, heavy drops of the thunder-shower began to fall, and before long a perfect torrent of rain poured from the sky, drenching my light summer habit through and through. Sancho, however, heeded it not, never even shaking his head as the water deluged it. In vain I tried, with all the strength of terror, to stay his frantic course; my effort only seemed to enrage him, and at last I had no resource, but to keep my seat, and be prepared for the worst.

As I had foreseen, no sooner did the road to the left, turning off across the chalk land, present itself, than my horse swept round the corner like an affrighted bird, and rushed onward with unabated speed. My heart was chilled with fear, as the flashes of lightning disclosed the rugged surface of the wild and dangerous country I was crossing. I was on the point of freeing my foot from the stirrup, and my knee from the pommel, and throwing myself off; but the remembrance of my father's precept, "always to keep my saddle, as long as my horse kept his feet," preserved me from that desperate rashness, and, fortunately for me, I held on.

At the pace we had come, we had soon left Morley at least five miles to the right, and in a straight course should have been nearly at home by this; but at least three miles had been taken over this wild open country, so that I could not form any precise idea of the locality I was in.

Notwithstanding the rain, the storm did not abate: every now and then the sky opened before us like vast doors flung back upon a world of fire, and each time Sancho uttered the same piteous neigh, and rushed on as if wild with terror.

ror. Once or twice I fancied that he answered to my voice, by proceeding at a less furious pace; but before I could take advantage of it, a roll of thunder or a flash of lightning drove him forward again with the headlong speed of madness.

We had just passed a small patch of heath, when Sancho sprang a covey of partridges, which appeared to have sought shelter on its outskirts; the whirring noise of their flight caused him suddenly to swerve to the left, and abandon the road, for the Common. Behind and before me, above and below, the whole firmament seemed to be on fire.

How I retained sufficient presence of mind not to scream, I can not tell; for death appeared so inevitable, that I had given up all hope of escape. I was now reaping the benefit of my father's lessons, before whom I should not have dared to scream, had I been falling down a precipice.

My head, however, was growing giddy (my heart had long been sick), and I felt that I could not much longer keep my seat. I was not fainting, for I was perfectly conscious; but all muscular power seemed deserting me: my hands and feet became cold and nerveless, and I felt that a leap, a swerve, or a start of Sancho would throw me off.

Just then, a wide black space, which a flash of lightning showed to be a heavy piece of fallow land, opened before us. In a moment, as if by a miracle, new strength animated my frame, and using my whip for the first time, I urged forward the half-frantic horse upon the heavy clay soil.

For a little while his courage and fright bore him on; but very soon, his speed slackened, his breath labored, and I had him again at command. Still my position was very little improved, for there I was alone, with a half-wearied horse, in a strange place, not knowing the country, the sky as dark as midnight, and the rain coming down like a deluge.

In the midst of my perplexity, I heard the welcome sound of a man's voice calling in his dogs; and looking eagerly to the quarter whence it came, I saw a figure advancing toward me. With a joyful exclamation, I hailed his approach, reining in Sancho easily, as I did so; and in a very few minutes, one of the Mowbray keepers came up.

"Oh! Miss Sackville, is it you?" and, "Oh! Davison, is it you?" were our mutual greetings.

I now found that my peregrinations had brought me much nearer home than I imagined; Mowbray being only a mile and a half from the fallow field which had done me such good service.

"You'd better not attempt riding on, until the storm is abated, Miss Sackville; so if you'll wait in that cottage yonder, and rest, I will go forward to Mowbray and say that you're safe. You had better keep on this heavy land till we reach the cottage; for your horse is not cowed enough yet to go quietly on turf."

I readily followed this sensible advice: indeed, I was passive; for now that my terror was over, I felt helpless, and thankfully accepted the keeper's offer to lead my horse. When we arrived at the cottage, I was lifted out of the saddle, so powerless that the people were obliged to carry me in; nor was it for some hours after, that my usual strength returned.

As he had suggested, Davison went on to Mowbray, and in an hour the rattle of wheels along the road (which I had overlooked in my flight) announced the approach of the carriage.

In a few minutes Sir Wallace and the housekeeper from Mowbray made their appearance; the latter having wisely brought a warm wrapping dress, to relieve me from the weight of my rain-soaked habit. When this change of attire had been effected, leaving a groom to follow with Sancho, we entered the carriage and drove home.

The storm had lulled, and the air was light again, the darkness having almost vanished with the tempest: but the twilight magnified the horrors of the country I had so recently passed over, and I shuddered.

"You have taken cold, miss," said the thoughtful housekeeper, drawing a cloak carefully round me.

"You're not going to play coward now all the danger's over?" said Sir Wallace.

No one said, "Thank God! Florence, for your escape," or bade me lift up my heart in gratitude to Heaven. But who ever did among those I lived with then?

After a night's sleep all was forgotten; and I joined the breakfast-table next day as cheerfully as the rest.

Three days after this adventure, Sir Wallace and Lady Mowbray, Milly and myself, were together in the library previous to going out to dinner, when a note was brought to the former, with a request for an immediate reply. He opened it, and after reading a few words, exclaimed:

"I wish to God, Agnes, I had not yielded to your representations about those Herrieses. Here is a note sent by the man in possession, saying that Herries is dying, and that the surgeon asserts the attack is caused wholly by the shock of my proceedings."

"I shall be the scorn of the whole county: and I deserve it, to have been led like a blind fool into taking such a step. Why, the man and his family have paid mine enough to buy their farm five times over. A distress for two years' rent! my God! Lady Mowbray, you have made a pretty fool of me."

And as he spoke he paced the room in a fury. Lady Mowbray's face turned from red to white, leaving it at last of an ashy paleness.

"Dying! Mr. Herries dying! and a distress in the house. Oh, Wallace, you can not have done this cruel thing!" cried Milly.

"I have, Milly: to my shame be it spoken, I have."

"And you promised!" she said, turning round indignantly to Lady Mowbray.

"What?—what did you promise, Agnes? Tell me: I am in no mood to be trifled with. What did you promise?" exclaimed Sir Wallace, passionately.

"Nothing that I have not performed," she answered, coolly.

"Oh! Lady Mowbray!" cried Milly, "how can you say so? Did I not hear you pledge your word to Mrs. Herries to investigate the matter, and then serve her if you could? And have you done so?"

Lady Mowbray's face crimsoned, but she replied, calmly,

"Whatever I saw fit to promise Mrs. Herries I have of course performed. But I will not be questioned in my own house, Miss Trevelyan, by any dependent of my husband's. It is a very unbecoming return for our charity, I think."

Milly's dark eyes literally flashed fire at these words, and she seemed about to speak; but her resolution failed, and she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Sir Wallace started, and made a hasty step forward to his cousin; then suddenly stopped. His whole frame shook with emotion, and the expression of his handsome countenance was changed to that of a man writhing with passion. His words came thick and fast, almost choking his utterance, and his lips were white and quivering.

"Unsay those words Agnes! or, by Heaven, you shall wish before long, that you had never married me! You are going too far. You taunt me in private, you come between me and my friends in public, you tamper with my name, and sport with my honor. But you shall do no more."

"You shall not drive from my house those who have been its inmates for years: those whose presence hallows it, and whose virtues might render it a Paradise. In this house, Milly and her mother are no more dependents than yourself. Your hold your place here as my wife, they hold it by a title older still—the promise of my dead father; and while one stone upon another remains to me of it, here they shall stay."

Lady Mowbray was silent: she was evidently gathering her powers for the conflict she had provoked; but, just as her lips opened to reply, a servant entered.

"The man who brought that note from Mr. Herries's, sir, sends his duty and desires me to ask if there is any answer, for he was ordered to lose no time."

"In a minute I will ring."

The man vanished, and Sir Wallace turned to his wife. All trace of passion was gone; but his tones were hard and bitter, as he said,

"I will not believe that you have intentionally deceived Mrs. Herries and myself, nor made a promise which you intended from the first to break. I will hope that circumstances have occurred, or some accident has happened—any thing, but that you have been guilty of willful deception. Still, some promise was made, and it must be kept. I have gone on with these legal proceedings in ignorance of it; but I am in ignorance no longer, and whatever pledge you, as my wife gave, I will fulfill. What did you promise?"

There was that in her husband's voice, which left Lady Mowbray no choice but to reply, and she answered scornfully—

"It is so long since, that I have nearly forgotten; but I have no doubt, whatever it was, I have performed it. I am quite as tender of my word as you are, Sir Wallace."

"I am glad of it; for then you will see the necessity of acknowledging at once, what passed between you and Mrs. Herries. Was it time for payment, or was it forgiveness of the claim, that you promised? For God's sake, Agnes, be candid, and let me save you and myself from the shame and reproach which threaten us. There

is not a landlord in the country, who would have done as you have made me do. That was bad enough, even if there had been no promise given; but having promised, it is infamous. Did you say the debt should be forgiven? speak Agnes."

"Certainly not. Considering the mortgages which have latterly been transferred, I did not know you were in circumstances to make such presents."

Sir Wallace's lip curled bitterly, and he said, "You do well to remind me of my bondage: the price paid for my noble mother's name. But I had not forgotten it, and your taunt might have been spared. However, it has answered one good purpose. It reminds me that, whatever else I may be, I am not so poor as I was, and can now afford to be generous."

He sat down, wrote a few lines, then rang the bell, and said to the servant who answered it—

"Here, I want you to witness this receipt; for I have no stamp. It is an acquittal of two years' rent and interest, due from Mr. Herries to me. Write your name here. There, now give that to the messenger, and tell him to make haste back to the farm. Stay, I will write to the man in possession: I must be answerable for all charges of this business. There, now order the carriage round instantly; and my horse, for I shall ride."

A frown of baffled malice and mortification contracted the brow of Lady Mowbray as her husband left the room, but she did not speak; except to desire that her maid should take Sir Wallace's place in the carriage, as she might require her services at Morley. This was the excuse she made to me; but it did not deceive me, for I knew it was to avoid the long tête-à-tête with us on the road.

That night, for the first time—but not for the last—I saw Sir Wallace Mowbray in a lamentable state of intoxication; while his wife, instead of screening his disgrace, made it as public as she could, without seeming to do so.

All the way home she was pitying herself, and challenging my sympathy, while he slept in one corner of the carriage, and poor Milly wept silently in another. Oh, how I wished myself at home! With all the miseries of Ingerdyne, my father and mother had never fallen so low as this.

I had not long retired to my own room for the night, when a tap upon the passage door leading from Milly's room to mine, aroused me from a reverie. I opened it, and found her leaning against the wall, sobbing bitterly.

"What is the matter, Milly?" I asked, leading her in: "You look very ill. Can I get you any thing?"

"No, I am not ill; only unhappy, Florence. I came to-night, late as it is, to beg you not to say a word to mamma of Lady Mowbray's cruel speech to-day: it would kill her."

"Of course not, Milly. I should not have done so, even if you had not desired it. But do not distress yourself about her: she is a false, treacherous woman, unworthy the station she has managed to obtain in this house; but, while your cousin remains as firm as he was to-day, she can not hurt you."

"But we are in her power, for we are so very poor. Mamma's means are scarcely sufficient for our wardrobe expenses; and, in her weak

state requiring more than ever the comforts she has always been accustomed to, it would kill her to leave Mowbray; or even to suspect how we are looked upon. If it were not for her, I would leave the house to-morrow; for it has become hateful to me since Lady Mowbray came. Poor, poor Wallace!"

"He deserves no pity; least of all yours, Milly; for he has sold himself, his integrity, and his self-respect, for money—for the power to continue the extravagances he loves better than faith or honor. Bad as she is, he is little better."

"The only difference is, that his impulses are more generous; but they are only impulses: he would never sacrifice his own gratification to carry them out. Even to-day, his generosity to those poor Herries was more to mortify his wife, and save his own reputation, than to serve them. It was a noble *looking* deed, but will not bear examination."

"Ah! Florence, you do not know him, and you judge of him from what he has seemed the last few months; but I have known him almost from infancy, and ever since my uncle's death he has been so kind, so generous to mamma."

"And to you, Milly?"

A deep blush crimsoned her face for a moment, and she looked up, with tears still standing in her eyes, and asked,

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing to vex you, dearest; though I am much mistaken if your cousin's first faith was pledged to his wife."

"It matters not, Florence. Wallace was a free man, both in heart and word, when he gave his hand to her."

"Very likely."

"It is true! Do not speak so incredulously. Besides, were it otherwise, surely he had good reason for what he did. Mowbray was heavily encumbered."

"Exactly; and therefore he sacrificed you and himself. Was I not right, Milly, when I said that he loved extravagances better than faith and honor?"

"No; and even if you were, I ought not to listen to you. Wallace has been a most kind friend to my mother, and I am worse than ungrateful, to suffer any thing to be said to me to his disparagement. You are very kind, Florence, but not always right. Now, good-night: it has struck three."

From this time there was a change for the worse at Mowbray. The indifference of the baronet and his wife became more and more apparent; their quarrels more public, and their carelessness of each other's wishes and feelings more evident.

But in this most unnatural warfare Lady Mowbray was the deepest aggressor. Nothing could exceed her cold, sneering taunts, nor the ingenuity with which she strove to mortify and annoy her husband. Milly, too, was now nearly always in tears: the light of her bright, happy smiles was quenched, and she grew pale, nervous, and miserable; while Sir Wallace became irritable, negligent, and self-indulgent. In short, by the time I had been three months at Mowbray, it was one of the most wretched places upon earth.

One thing in Lady Mowbray's conduct has always struck me as diabolical. It was the way

in which she plotted to throw Milly and her husband together. I could not then comprehend the cause for the unnatural cruelty and wickedness of her scheme; but since it has become apparent, my only wonder is, that those so terribly implicated did not see the snare and avoid it.

At last, to my great joy, Christmas came, and I returned home. I was wild with delight, and danced and sang about the house as if I had taken leave of my senses. Home!—dear, dear home! I forgot that there was any thing there to make me sad or fearful. I thought only of being under its roof again.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE day after I returned, was Christmas day: that most glorious festival of all the year. According to custom, there was open house that day at Ingerdyne: whoever chose came in and claimed the old dole of bread, meat, and beer. At noon there was dinner for the cottagers, and in the evening supper and a dance. All the servants bade their friends, the village fiddler came up, the servants' hall was dressed with laurustinus and other evergreens, and the old house rang with merriment and glee.

Helen and I, distributed huge pieces of cake and plum-pudding among the old women, for such of their grandchildren as had been left at home, and gave to each of my grandmother's ancient pensioners the flannel and hose she had been wont to bestow. All the morning long we were going about the village: and if the poor people enjoyed the day half as much as we did, Christmas must have been a happy time to them. I have never spent any such since.

But this bright season soon passed away, and a thousand things brought the certainty of my father's embarrassments home to me. At the lower part of the estate, all the best of the timber had been cut down, and several great oaks, here and there, were still marked for felling. Four large pictures, which had been in the family for years, and upon which my grandfather prided himself—*chefs d'œuvre* of some of the best of the old Flemish masters—were gone; as the servants said, to be cleaned.

Worse than all, a beautiful inlaid cabinet, full of exquisite miniatures, richly framed, and containing a costly and rare old tea-service of chased Venetian silver, which had been presented to one of our ancestors by a foreign sovereign, in memory of some great service he had rendered to him, was gone also.

These indications of the coming storm made me very wretched; but as neither my father nor mother spoke to me upon the subject, I, coward-like, dreaded the reply too much to volunteer any inquiry.

While I had been at Mowbray, our nearest neighbor and oldest friend, Mr. Comberton of Aston, had died, and all his family were gone abroad. General Vaughton and Mary were in Scotland, and my father had contrived, in some way or other, to quarrel with almost every one else; so that when, about a week after Christmas, he returned to London—from which it did not appear as if he could absent himself for a month together—my mother, Helen, and I were alone.

By this time my sister had become more of a companion to me than formerly; and if she could have conquered her extreme fear of riding, we should have had many pleasant hours together.

She was still exactly what she had been as a child: fair, beautiful, and thoughtless; fond of admiration, and eager for pleasure; with a lively fancy and a careless tongue, alternately caressing and sarcastic. Her mood was ever changing; but she was charming and graceful in all. The entire love of her heart was divided between my mother and herself. Sometimes I fancied she had taken up an affection for a playful kitten or a very mischievous puppy; but, on the whole, she loved no one but her mother and herself.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast between any two sisters, than between Helen and me. I was very tall and slight, with dark complexion, brown eyes and hair; which last, I wore in a fashion not common then, although it has become so since—I mean bound round my head, and plaited into a roll behind. In disposition I was proud, enthusiastic, and self-dependent; full of love for all who would love me, and sensitive to a degree which, if it had been displayed, would have made me ridiculous. I was passionate in temper, romantic in ideas, and acted upon impulses which, though mostly generous and unselfish, were yet wild and ill-regulated; capable of any self-sacrifice, for the sake of those I fancied thrown upon my generosity, but grievously undisciplined and ungoverned; without religious training or principle, and only my own vague ideas, and proud instincts as to right and wrong, to guide me.

Helen was the reverse of all this. She was of middle stature, fair, with blue eyes and rich auburn hair, which hung about her graceful little head in ringlets. Her arms, neck, and brow were white as a snow-drift; her manner was by turns that of an empress or a child. Selfish and exacting, she had no sympathy or care except for her own griefs and joys, yet she claimed from others an undue share of both. Easily alarmed, but fond of power; eager for flattery, though too clever to be credulous, she was wild and wayward as a humming-bird, and almost as winning and lovely; with a voice, every tone of which was music, and a figure, every movement of which was grace. Such was Helen, the pet and the beauty; and such was I.

Still, opposite as were our natures, we kept tolerably good friends; for the follies of childhood were passed; and though Helen sometimes feigned to quiz me for the brogue which she pretended to detect, I was too old now to be visibly annoyed, or to care very much about it. Besides, she came to me in all her dilemmas, of which she contrived to get into a multitude, and kept me so continually employed in her service, that I could not but love, as much as she would let me, the bright and beautiful creature who appeared to rely so constantly upon me.

There must certainly be something peculiar about me, for ever since I can remember, all sorts of people have come to me to get them out of their scrapes: those who never cared an atom about me at other times, on such occasions have seemed to idolize me. So much for self-interest. It was during this summer that I learned to

love Ingerdyne so dearly. As if I knew that I was soon to leave them, every tree and flower, glade and hedge-row about the place, became invested with a new and mysterious attraction; and the branch of the old box-tree, of which I had been so fond as a child, was daily more dearly cherished.

Oh, what a sweet spot it was, upon which this box-tree grew and looked! Beneath, lay the deep, dark moat, with its sombre and still water, on whose surface, paved with their broad green leaves, rose, like silver thrones, the cups of the regal water-lily—each one to my fancy the home of some beautiful Undine.

All around, like a young forest, towered the forms of the wych-elm and mountain-pine; around them, clinging lovingly half-way up, grew myriads of wild hops, which, after they had reached the height of many feet, as if actuated by one coquettish impulse, all flung themselves from the trees, and by the aid of a faithful tendril which here and there clung to a drooping bough, mingled their leaves and snake-like heads into a rich canopy above; through whose festoons of foliage you could catch stray glimpses of the blue vault beyond.

The floor of this bower was carpeted with ivy, which crept down to the very edge of the moat, and wound caressingly about the stems of the stately water-plants. In the summer, rain never appeared to penetrate here: pour as it would outside, here was always a dry and safe retreat. It was pleasant to sit and listen to the drops pattering upon the embowered roof over head; and watch them dancing upon the surface of the moat, sweeping the water every now and then in tiny waves over the calm lilies.

No place has ever been so dear to me as that quiet bower; and often when I have felt sad and lonely in the noisy world of London, or sickened by the flattering courtesies of popularity, my heart has flown back, like the bird to her nest, to that lonely branch, hanging over the quiet country moat, miles, miles away.

Helen never liked this retreat, and used to ridicule me unmercifully for my romantic love of the "Aquatic Bower," as she called it; but I took no heed: no one ever lived who could laugh me out of liking any thing or creature that I really loved.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN the July of this year I received another most pressing invitation from Lady Mowbray to visit her for a few days. She was ill, she said, and expecting a host of people from town, whom she wanted help to entertain. My father happened to be with us at the time, and insisted upon my accepting the invitation; therefore, although bitterly against my will, I consented to go.

Lady Mowbray's letter contained an inclosure to my mother, requesting that she and Helen would go to an archery meeting there on the 30th, stay for the ball at night, and accompany the guests to the races at Martley the day after.

Lady Mowbray entreated my mother to forget Helen's age, and suffer her to come, saying that there would be many among the party quite as young, and not half so attractive; and, as Helen

begged very hard to be allowed to go, my mother yielded to her entreaties.

When, upon the appointed day, I reached Mowbray, I found the family and visitors all out; gone, the servants said, to Martley, to look at a new stand on the race-course.

Very well pleased with the information, which afforded me the prospect of a few hours' rest, I threw off my bonnet and shawl, took a new novel of Scott's from the library table, and went out into the grounds in search of a shady seat.

There was a pleasant moss-house in the "American garden," placed in such a position that the shrubberies ran up to it at right angles; the seats faced opposite directions; the occupants sitting back to back, and all communication between the two ranges of seats was cut off by the trees and shrubs, which grew close up to the entrances. The house was circular, and open all round (except where the shrubberies came close to it); so that it was impossible for any person coming from the side nearest the lake, to know that others were in the opposite division.

This moss-house was a favorite seat of mine. It reminded me somewhat of my own bower at home, and I liked to sit and watch the swans and waterfowl sail by on the lake: so to this old seat I went.

I had not sat there long, when, tired with my journey and the heat, I fell asleep. I might perhaps have slept half an hour, ere I was aroused by voices in the other side of the summer-house. One was earnest and urgent; the other soft, low, and tearful; but I recognized both instantly: they were those of Sir Wallace and Milly.

Before I was sufficiently collected to remember my position as a listener, I heard the following conversation:

"I will not endure it any longer, Wallace! it is more than I can bear. My life is worn away by these insults and taunts: I will go away."

"And your mother?"

"Ah! there's the misery!" replied Milly, with a passionate burst of tears. "She is the tie which binds me here. Had it not been for her, I would have left Mowbray—months, months ago."

"Well then, Milly, be reasonable, like a good dear girl as you are; and bear my sweet wife's amiabilities with patience. She wants to drive you away, because she knows we all love you; but she can not succeed, unless you help her."

"Love! God help me! that dream is past."

"Milly!" exclaimed her companion, in a voice which sent the blood rushing to my temples, it was so vehement and full of passion; "Milly!"

Apparently it startled her too, for she moved restlessly: but with an unaccountable infatuation—as if the words which evidently hovered on his lips possessed a resistless fascination, and must be uttered, be the consequences what they might—she said, "It is true. It was a dream, and I have awakened: pity that I did not do so earlier."

"What was a dream? and from what are you awakened?"

There was no answer.

"If it was that I loved you—that I love you now, beyond all that you can imagine or conceive—dream on; for it is true. I do love you, Milly!"

A deep groan burst from the laboring heart of his wretched listener.

"And you love me, Milly! Do not deny it; for it is the only consolation left me in the wreck I have made of my happiness: and I need it, for I am very miserable."

His voice sank as he concluded, and he threw himself back upon the seat he had quitted, while Milly's sobs came deep and fast.

"Fool! madman that I have been! Why did I ever leave this quiet happy place, for the worthless extravagances which brought me so low as to sell myself, like a slave, for money!"

"Oh, Milly, Milly! four years ago, when we parted in this very bower, if you had but forgiven me those hasty words I spoke in random folly, I should have been a happy man, and you an honored wife. One word then would have saved us both. I warned you, but you would not listen. See what our mad pride has done!"

"Forgive me!" murmured a voice, so low that I could scarcely distinguish it.

A burst of passionate self-reproach, mingled with frantic expressions of love, answered this meek exclamation; in the midst of which, as if now first awakened to a sense of the crime she was committing, Milly repeated earnestly,

"Do not—do not say this! It is a sin for you to speak, and for me to hear. Go, go! If you really love me, go!"

"Never, Milly! until you have promised to accompany me. Fly with me to Italy! The ambition and pride of Agnes are boundless: she will never resign herself to the condition of a deserted wife; but, having once experienced the pleasures of rank, will eagerly obtain a divorce from me, to enable her to marry some greater man. Then, once more free, Milly, dearest—dearest Milly, I am yours forever! Nothing on earth shall part us: for who but themselves can separate husband and wife?"

My breath almost stopped as I listened to this specious and passionate appeal, and heard Milly's agonized sobs. But at this moment I saw some one entering the walk by the lake, and springing quickly from my seat, I hastened to join Jane Aubrey.

My reply to her greeting was hurried and confused; for the conversation I had involuntarily overheard had shocked and perplexed me, so that I was much relieved when she proposed that we should go to our own rooms, to rest before dinner.

"You are to have your old room. Lady Mowbray asked me to take care of you, while she went to lie down, and refresh herself after the storm which has just passed over the domestic hemisphere. I don't wonder at her being tired; the only surprise to me is, that she does not fret herself to death with torturing others. What a Red Indian she would have made?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ah! I forgot, you know nothing about it at present: well, I must enlighten you. But you were here quite long enough last year, not to be surprised at being told that Lady Mowbray is wily as a diplomatist, heartless as a rich relation, tyrannical as a despot, and mean as a miser."

"Now all these delightful qualities she has brought to bear upon her husband and poor Milly Trevelyan. How he bears it so calmly, is a mystery to me. As for her other victim, she, poor girl, is in a state bordering on insanity. At times she seems quite apathetic, as if

worn down by her lady cousin's sneers; and at others, she is furious as a maniac.

"I have been here six weeks; and really, if it were not for the archery and the races, I should have gone back to Morley more than five weeks ago; for I am heartily tired of our hostess's way of killing her friends by inches: and, between you and me, I think matters are progressing to a *finale* of some kind, which it may not be altogether pleasant to witness."

"How do you mean?" I inquired.

"I may be wrong, and I don't like to be scandalous; so I shall leave you to find it out by your own sagacity. Now, come, lie down upon the sofa, and tell me what you've been doing since that memorable thunderstorm. You know I went to Scotland the day after."

We had not long been thus engaged, when a tap upon the door roused us both, and Milly entered the room. The impression of the conversation I had heard, restrained the eagerness of my advance, and the ardor of my greeting. She did not seem to observe this, however, but came up to me with all the frankness of old times, saying,

"They told me down stairs that you were come, Florence, and that you were lying down; but I could not help disturbing you. I am so glad to see you. And now if you are really tired you shall lie down again, and I will stay and help you to dress when the bell rings. Jane, you pride yourself upon your helplessness as a lady's maid, so you may leave Florence in my charge, and go and write some of those endless letters you always have on hand."

"Agreed! only, as Florence was placed under my care by Lady Mowbray, I am responsible for her safety; so don't talk her to death," replied Jane Aubrey, as she retired.

From the moment of Milly's entrance, my eyes had been riveted upon her countenance. Oh, how she was altered! her face had lost its roundness and clearness, and was lengthened, pale, and mournful; her eyes seemed larger than before, and looked dim and sad, encircled by that livid blue tinge which tells so eloquently of fading health, or a sorrowing heart. Her hair, parted carelessly on her pale brow, hung in heavy ringlets on each side of her head; and her once merry smile was changed to one so faint and wintry, that it made my heart ache to see it.

I am not at all addicted to the melting mood; but when I compared the spirit-broken creature before me, with the blithe light-hearted girl I had parted from a few months before, my grief could not be repressed, and I burst into tears.

"What is the matter, Flory?" asked she, in her gentle, caressing voice. "And why do you turn away? What has vexed you?"

"You, Milly! you look so ill and changed."

"Do I?" she replied, with a wan, sickly smile. "I am not ill, nor changed; except that I am more unhappy than I was."

"Indeed, indeed, Milly, your face bears witness to it. But do not, for God's sake! do that which will make the grief you suffer now, light in comparison. You look so wretched that I fear for your courage."

"You speak very strangely, Florence; and without right, I think. What is it you fear that I should do?" retorted Milly, in a tone of indignation.

"Take what seems happiness now, to insure misery forever."

"You talk in riddles," she said, proudly, turning away.

"Oh, Milly dearest! let your own heart interpret them. For your mother's sake, be warned in time."

"Miss Sackville, you are using most unwarrantable language to me: besides that it is perfectly incomprehensible. You must excuse me if I beg that such observations may cease."

"Milly!" I said, slowly, and standing calmly before her, "I was in the moss-house by the lake an hour ago."

She did not speak, but she turned frightfully pale; and, with a sigh which sounded like a death-gasp, fell upon the sofa from which I had just risen.

"I was alone, dearest! and no one shall ever hear from my lips what passed there. Only be firm and true to yourself. I am neither very old nor wise, Milly; but it does not require to be either, to see the misery and sin of the step which has been proposed to you."

Her head sank upon the arm of the sofa, and she wept convulsively; while I knelt before her, and took her icy hands in mine. My heart was breaking for her, for I dearly loved her, and my burning tears fell upon her fingers. She knew, she felt, that I was in earnest—that it was for her welfare I spoke—and she listened.

But my words wanted power: that power which only religion can give; and, for any good they did, I might as well have been silent. I talked to her as one worshipping to another, and prevailed not; for the holy principle I would have awakened in her heart, to save her, could only be aroused by the spirit of Christian Faith and self-denial: and that, alas! was wanting.

A very little time, a very few words, sufficed to make me conscious then, as I had been many times before, that in some great thing I was deficient. I knew there was a glorious light somewhere, and that I was in darkness. I could not have told *where* was my insufficiency, nor in what it consisted; but I knew that it did exist, and in all emergencies I felt it. Years after, I knew it well; and mourned bitterly, as all must do sooner or later, the early want of that religion, without which all our principles, instincts, and impulses, are, at the best, but blind and uncertain guides.

In this case, what might not the words of faithful Christian truth have effected for Milly's preservation? And how powerless were mine—ardent, eager, zealous as they were!

For the soul's need, and in its time of peril, nothing can be effectual, but religion: all other things may be tried, with deep fervor and loving zeal; but the labor will be thrown away: the Divine gift will only respond to a kindred voice.

Thus it was that, although I knelt at Milly's knee, pouring forth the most earnest and ardent entreaties and remonstrances I could command, I felt my words were useless: she listened—as her gentle nature could not but do—to the vehement language of a love which feared her displeasure less than her sin; but though she heard, she did not heed.

"Milly, darling Milly!" I exclaimed passionately, in despair at her passive, tearful silence, "do not be led by this wicked and selfish man."

into a gulf from which no power on earth can rescue you. Do not be the sacrifice to his base and faithless nature! Faithless, treacherous to one he has vowed to love and cherish, how can he be true to you? And when he fails—as fail he will—then, Milly, what will become of you? Cast off by the good, claimed as equal by those whom you now scorn to name; lost to the one, and yet too pure for the other—oh, dearest! what will you do?"

As I said this she sprang up with a sudden energy, and throwing off my embrace, exclaimed,

"Be silent, Florence! You torture me to death! How dare you think that I shall do evil? or that, if I chose to do so, your words could stay me? You are bolder than usual to speak to me thus."

She walked toward the door, while I rose sorrowfully, and fixed my eyes upon her retiring figure. On reaching the door, she paused a moment, looked round, and with a repentant impulse stretched out both her hands toward me, exclaiming, as I sprang forward to seize them,

"I am very miserable!"

I threw my arms around her, and her cold deathlike brow fell upon my burning shoulder.

She did not weep; her tears seemed not so much frozen, as powerless to fall; nor did she resist my effort to lead her back to the sofa. For a few minutes I chafed her hands, but they remained icy as before. After a while she said, slowly,

"Do not judge me hardly, Florence, neither now nor hereafter. I have been cruelly tried; and if I sink at last, none can ever tell how I have suffered and struggled. You think me weak and wicked; and so I may be, for I am no fit judge of myself; but if I am, look for the cause in my bitter, bitter misery. You are shame-stricken at the love between him and myself; but it is no new thing; it has grown up with us, and ever since I can remember, it has been so intimate a part of myself, that I never asked my heart when it began or ended.

"Four years ago he asked me to be his wife, and I consented. It seemed only promising a continuance of the affection I had felt from infancy; for I had lived here with mamma and my dear uncle so long, that the idle talk of love and marriage had never but once enlightened my still childish imagination; and, though I knew that I loved him best of all on the earth, still I did not know that the love he sought was of a different nature.

"From this sprang all our misery; and one day, upon his reproaching me with insensibility, some altercation arose between us, when he uttered cruel words, which I was too proud to forgive. What has followed, has been my own fault, for he warned me that if he left Mowbray then (he was going to London), unreconciled, his misery and mine would be the consequence: that he would forget me, and seek happiness elsewhere, and that the end would be terrible."

"Well," she resumed, after a long pause, "he went; and, when week after week brought fresh accounts of his reckless and almost mad career of dissipation and extravagance, my heart smote me that I was the cause.

"But as time wore on, and he did not return, this feeling changed—to one of indignation first, and indifference (as I thought) afterward. And,

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as there was none here either to soothe or irritate me, so it remained, until he brought home the wife he had chosen in my stead.

"What I have suffered since—from her cruelty, from the reproaches of my own heart, and from the sight of his misery—you can not, and God grant you never may know!

"I am poor, and my mother depends on him for the home and comforts which alone keep her alive. And upon this enforced dependence Lady Mowbray has presumed, until she has driven me mad. She is a heartless and hateful woman, and I am sure there is some well-kept secret upon her conscience, which steels her against her husband; for she detests him, and would fain madden him, as she has done me. She plays with us both, as if her sole object and chief satisfaction were in our ruin; and although I see the snare, I am helpless as a bird under the gaze of a rattlesnake.

"Whatever I may do, pity me! for there is not an outcast upon this wide world who more deserves pity than I do. Turn which way I will, there is wretchedness; and either way I must die soon, for my life is worn out."

After a long and mournful silence, I said, almost unconsciously, "Your mother?"

"Ah!" she replied, dreamily, repeating the same words she had used to her cousin: "there is the tie which has bound me here so long. But if she knew how miserable I am, she would set me free—and then, when I am Lady Mowbray, she shall reign here like a queen: he has promised."

There was something so unusual in her voice as she spoke, that I bent forward to look at her. I was but just in time; for, as I did so, she fell back upon the sofa insensible.

The whole of that afternoon and evening, regardless of the repeated messages of Lady Mowbray, urging me to come down, I remained with Milly. She spoke very little, for she seemed worn out and listless—pining for rest; and I sat by the couch on which she lay, too full of my own sorrowful thoughts and fears to feel inclined to talk.

As I looked on the wreck of that fair and once happy young creature, I could not help thinking how much Lady Mowbray had to answer for.

When they shall both die, and stand before the everlasting judgment-seat, will any distinction be made between the assassin's knife, and the envenomed words which destroyed happiness, as well as life? Will not the last be counted worst? for they bespeak an evil and malicious heart, and deliberate, calculating cruelty; whereas the first may result from the furious impulse of a moment.

And if so, alas! alas! how many murderers stalk about our streets at noonday, unsuspected and unshunned by men; but who, to angel eyes, bear upon their brows the loathsome brand of Cain?

How many gentle beings, year after year, sink into the grave, done to death as murderously by cruel words and sneering taunts, as ever were any of those who are avenged by the hangman's cord?

CHAPTER XXIII.

AND NOW I must hurry on; for dark shadows began to thicken round my path. Home, with

its quiet joys and comforts, had lately become more and more endeared to me by the increasing affection of my mother and sister, which suffering and sorrow had developed; and the violent temper and reckless courses of my father, though they marred our peace and happiness, yet drew the bonds of affection closer between his wife and her children.

From the pleasant, though subdued and fading light in which Ingerdyne now appeared to me, I was about to emerge, and enter upon the gloom of poverty and grief. What remains to be told of poor Milly's fate, therefore, must be quickly related.

At the archery meeting, Milly gained the first prize, greatly to the satisfaction of every body but Lady Mowbray, who had been practicing for weeks, and whose mortification at her defeat was intense.

What took place between the victor and the vanquished, at their *tête-à-tête* in the tent after the contest, I never knew; but I met them coming out, and almost started at the expression of their countenances. Milly looked flushed and incensed, her eyes kindled with passion and indignation, and her lips quivered with excitement; while Lady Mowbray was pale as a ghost, her lips white with suppressed emotion, and her manner lofty, but icy cold. She appeared as if she had goaded her enemy to madness with the spur of her bitter taunts, and now triumphed in her vengeance.

They both passed me without a word, each turning into paths that branched off in opposite directions.

Half an hour after this, the sound of the bugle called us all to the luncheon-tent, and on entering it with Jane Aubrey and Mr. Bellair, I saw Milly leaning against one of the flower-wreathed pillars, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, listening to Sir Wallace, who was evidently trying to persuade her to take some step to which she was averse. As soon, however, as he saw that he was observed, and his *tête-à-tête* commented upon, the baronet came gayly forward, and occupied himself with his duties as host, while Milly made her way through the crowd, and went out into the grounds.

"That girl won't live long," said a gentleman, who stood near to me, as she passed us. "If ever Death marked any of his prey before he struck, there is a victim."

After lunch, Jane Aubrey and I walked to see a favorite view from the upper end of the park, and wandered about until our watches told us it was quite time to return, if we hoped for dinner.

Passing by the lake arbor on the side nearest to the house, we saw Milly sitting there with a note in her hand, and weeping bitterly. Our first impulse was to go to her; but she heard our approaching footsteps, and starting from her seat, ran quickly past us, dropping in her flight the paper she had been reading. Jane was so astonished at her strange manner, that she did not observe the note; which, as she looked after Milly's retreating steps, I hastily picked up without speaking, intending to return it to its owner when we should be alone. At dinner, Milly was *calm and pale as a statue*; she seldom spoke, and when she did, her words were few and cold: there was no trace left of the light-hearted girl I had known a year before.

At ten o'clock the ball guests began to arrive, and very soon the rooms were crowded. Lady Mowbray was in her element; although, even in this hour of pleasure, she sought every opportunity of insulting and mortifying poor Milly. Surely, as the raven scents blood, she saw the catastrophe that was coming, and like a fiend hurried it on. Every body observed and commented upon her manner; for most people loved her victim; while even those who flattered their hostess most obsequiously, condemned her in their consciences.

During the early part of the night, I noticed a propitiating beseeching gentleness in Milly's manner, which seemed to implore from Lady Mowbray a cessation of hostilities; and I do believe that one kind word or smile would have saved the hapless girl from the abyss which even then yawned to engulf her. But it was vain: none ever looked for tenderness from Lady Mowbray, and found it.

At last, it seemed as if Milly, assured of this, became reckless; for her laugh, once so gentle and sweet, sounded strangely in the room; and her quiet manner had changed to a *fiercé* and recklessness very painful to witness. I was astonished and angry: had I been older, I should have known that this manner evinced the forced spirits of desperation, and should have pitied, instead of condemned her. She waltzed and danced indefatigably, met Lady Mowbray's sneering smile with a defying laugh; and altogether was as unlike herself as possible.

Once we stood for a minute together at the top of a quadrille, and I could not refrain from whispering,

"You vex me to-night, Milly! Are you mad, that you fly about so?"

The expression of her face changed suddenly, and she said, in suppressed tones, but with a sharp, stinging voice,

"Mad! yes, quite. To-morrow, remember that I told you so. Do not forget," and in a moment she was dancing again.

I was very tired when the ball was over, for I had danced all night, and, passionately fond as I am of the amusement, was fairly tired out; so as soon as the last carriage drove off, I ran upstairs to bed.

I remember awaking in the night, at the noise of a door closing very near to me, almost as if it were in my own room, and directly after hearing a sound as of carriage-wheels on the road; but I was so drowsy and overcome with fatigue, that I took no notice of it, and fell asleep again directly.

In the morning, however, before I was up, Lady Mowbray's maid came to me, and asked leave to pass through my room to Miss Trevelyan's, as her door was locked, and she could not arouse her. Half-asleep, half-awake I assented, and the girl went in; but returned immediately, saying that no one was there, and that the bed had not been slept in.

I was now thoroughly frightened, and sprang up instantly, as the maid exclaimed,

"It is very strange! Sir Wallace is not in my lady's room this morning, I see. But her ladyship is asleep, and I do not dare to wake her. It's very odd."

Oh! how sick at heart, and faint I felt! The truth flashed upon my mind with a horrible con-

viction that left no room for hope or doubt; and I sat down bewildered, as if stunned with a heavy blow.

In a very short time the whole house was up, and the frightful tale in every body's mouth. How poor Milly's name was bandied about from one stranger to another! And how cruelly she was judged! The women, her companions and friends, trampled out her good name, now that she was fallen, and so disgusted were they all, that they were eager to excuse themselves for ever having known her. No voices were raised on her behalf: none remembered her gentleness, her misery, and her suffering, but Mr. Bellair, Jane Aubrey, and her mother. Oh! the vindictiveness of women against a fallen rival is the bitterest thing on earth.

All was confusion; that worst of confusion—the strife of scandalous and malicious tongues. Many tales were told of the conduct of the guilty pair, of which at least one half was utterly false; and the rest tortured into meanings and significance as much at variance with truth as malice could devise.

It was quite wonderful to hear how every body had foreseen what had happened: how mothers had warned their daughters against too great an intimacy with the culprit, and how the young ladies had always thought her a “bold, forward creature.” Some men, too, to whom Milly would never have condescended even to speak, except in a house where she was in some sort hostess, now smiled significantly, shrugging their shoulders, as if to imply an insolence they dared not utter; and others sneered scornfully.

All this seemed very strange to me then. But yesterday she had been the idol of these people, a model for the women, and a contested prize for the men, and now, within twelve hours, they all with one accord forsook and vilified her; denied their past allegiance, and made me forget her sin, grievous as it was, in their utter baseness. Oh, how indignant I felt!

Of all the people who now made loud and bitter outcry, magnifying Milly's crime, and maligning her past conduct, there was not one but had courted and flattered her—not one whom she had not served. But all was forgotten now: she was a *detected* criminal; and for the discovery, *not* the sin, they forsook her.

And Lady Mowbray. Heaven forgive, if I wrong her! but I do believe that, as she had plotted for this most horrible catastrophe, so now she triumphed in its completion. The smile of a fiend was in her cold, gleaming eyes; and as she sat in her own room, receiving silently the condolence of her guests, there was an aspect and air about her quiet manner, which betrayed deep hate satisfied.

Why she so detested Milly, I never knew till after, when the whole dark secret was revealed by her maid and confidante; and that I may take leave of her ladyship forever, I will give the woman's confession here.

When Lady Mowbray (then Agnes Davenport) was a girl of sixteen, at school in a large garrison town in the north of England, she had attracted the attention of a cavalry officer, who was stationed at the barracks.

By the assistance of her maid (at that time a servant in the school), she saw him daily; and what was only a flirtation to him, soon became

a matter of life and death to her. With all the passion of a wild, undisciplined mind, she loved her handsome admirer; who, worn out with excitement, and thoroughly *blasé*, soon tired of her romance, and although she could not see it, only amused himself with her devotion. To his prudence, and not to her own discretion, was she indebted for her escape from scandal.

When, after a year's sojourn at —, the regiment to which he belonged, left the town and went into other quarters, the shock of separation, which she had never seemed to anticipate, brought on a brain fever; and as soon as it was safe to do so, she was removed to her guardian's distant home. Here she pined for months, till, alarmed for her life, the old brewer sent her to London for medical advice.

Strangely enough, at the house of the friends to whose care she was consigned, she met again her soldier lover! It was not in human nature that he should escape being touched by the sight of her faded beauty and woe-worn features, so flattering to his vanity; and, under the impulse of pity and self-love, he renewed those attentions, the absence of which had already nearly destroyed her.

Thus matters went on, till, at the end of another year, they were secretly affianced: for he made it a condition of his condescension, that no one should be told of the engagement until he permitted it. Meanwhile, he returned to Sheffield, and Agnes to her guardian, without any one but her maid having an idea of the state of affairs.

In this way another year passed, her love increasing and strengthening, and his dying utterly away. At last, six months before she first met Sir Wallace, she received a letter from her lover, breaking off, with many expressions of regret and self-accusation, “the unfortunate engagement into which he had hurried her.” He entreated her to think no more of him, confessed with shame that his heart had never been interested, and that he could never excuse his treachery; but concluded with the information that he had met his fitting punishment by a recent refusal from the only woman whom he had ever loved.

Poor girl! all that had ever been good in her vanished from that day: her heart was hardened to all feelings but revenge, and she made a solemn vow to spend her life in discovering and persecuting to ruin, or death, the woman who, by captivating her lover, had unconsciously destroyed her peace.

In this spirit she married Sir Wallace, as she would have done any other man who had rank and freedom to offer her: both of which were necessary to the successful prosecution of her scheme of vengeance.

Unhappily for both, she discovered within a very few days after her marriage, that, although she possessed her husband's hand, his heart and affections had not accompanied it; and although she was more than indifferent herself, she resented this as if she had been the most exemplary and affectionate of wives.

Smarting under a sense of this new wrong, she reached Mowbray, and there met, upon its very threshold, her unconscious rival both in her husband's heart and that of her former lover—and, to complete this chain of extraordinary cir-

circumstances, the faithless soldier was the only son of her near neighbors the Lancasters, to whom Milly had been known from infancy; while she had also been the choice and loved companion of her cousin's heart, from his schooldays!

Truth is indeed stranger than fiction! In life there are coincidences quite as extraordinary, and rencontres as unlooked for, as in the most romantic story: we not unfrequently meet in our migrations with the very people we least expect, and least desire to fall in with. The facts of Milly's double rivalry of Lady Mowbray are no less true than strange.

In this unwelcome discovery, there was enough to have stung a gentle heart cruelly; but to one so proud, ruthless, and passionate as Lady Mowbray, no wonder it exasperated her to frenzy. Suffering, which exalts and purifies a noble nature, depraves and hardens those of baser kind; and the effort that Agnes Davenport made to conceal her emotions, and indulge her passion, induced dissimulation and craft.

She went about the work of ruin with a resolution and stealth which fiends might have envied. No compunction toward the wretched girl, round whom she was weaving her hideous net, ever visited her heart; no compassion for the bereaved and miserable mother, whom she was thus dooming to misery and shame; no womanly tenderness for the husband she was plotting to destroy; not one relenting impulse or remorseful thought was suffered to delay or divert her purpose: she pursued a course of hard, bitter, cruel revenge, with vindictive tenacity of purpose, and that feeling of malignant satisfaction in others' suffering, which makes men love and revel in the tortures they inflict.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VERY few hours elapsed before Mowbray was deserted by the guests who had thronged it.

I was in my room packing trunks, and crying bitterly the while, when a message from Mrs. Trevelyan reached me, entreating that I would go to her. Trembling in every limb, and half stupefied with fear and grief, I prepared to obey her summons; and after bathing my eyes, that I might look somewhat more composed, I went to her room.

I opened the door softly and fearfully; not that I fancied she was asleep, but because there is a solemnity in the presence of such deep sorrow as hers, which involuntarily subdues the spirits, and hushes all disturbing sounds.

"Come in—come in!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, sharply and impatiently; "come in, Florence!"

I entered. She was upon the bed, half lying, half bending forward, leaning upon both hands, with her eyes fixed eagerly upon the door.—When she saw me, she exclaimed,

"Come here, Florence Sackville, and tell me what is this foul lie that they are saying of my child. What is this base, false scandal that they dare to say of Milly?"

She spoke vehemently, almost furiously, in a tone of voice so new and strange to me, that, instead of answering, I was frightened into silence.

"Speak girl, speak!" she cried, seizing my

hand with a convulsive grasp, and gazing into my face with a searching keenness, which, if I had meditated a falsehood, would have detected it in the utmost depths of the soul. "Speak: where is Milly?"

"I do not know," I answered faintly.

"Not know! not know! It is false! I will not believe it. Such friends as you were, she would have gone nowhere without your knowledge. Not know! what do you think?"

I could not speak; for the anguish in her face distracted me: and I dared not tell her the truth. Overcome by my feelings, I sank down by the bed, and hiding my face in the clothes, burst into tears.

"Florence! Florence!" cried the poor mother, in tones of such misery, that I shuddered as I knelt, "what is all this? It is not true what they have been saying; speak—speak! it is not true?"

"Oh! do not ask me! pray—pray, do not ask me!"

"But I must, Florence. The truth must be spoken at all times, and I do think that from you I shall hear it: I expect it—so I ask you again, and come what may, I will have an answer.—Where is my daughter, Milly?"

"Gone!" I sobbed out.

"Where? with whom?" she asked, fiercely.

"I do not know; but I fear with her cousin."

"No! no! it can not be. Do not you say so, Florence: do not you say so!"

Again, I could make no answer, but my tears; and soon she asked in a faint voice,

"Why do you say so? You would not judge her hardly? why do you think so?"

Her failing voice made me look up, and I saw that she was fainting. In a moment I sprang to my feet, laid her tenderly down, and with cold water and eau-de-Cologne, both of which stood close by, bathed her temples until she revived. My tears mingled plentifully with the water I was using, for I knew that the death-blow had been struck; and my heart bled for Milly's despair when she should learn this consequence of her crime.

In a very short time the eyes of the sufferer unclosed, and in a feeble voice, not louder than a whisper, she bade me tell her all I knew and feared.

How I obeyed, I do not know. I would gladly have hidden the evil tale in my heart forever; but I had no choice, and, in as few words as I could, I told her all.

"And that note," she said when I had finished, alluding to the one I had picked up the day before, "what is it? where is it?"

"I do not know; for, of course, I did not read it: but it is here."

"Give it to me."

I did so; but in a minute she returned it, saying, "I can not see: read it to me. Whose writing is it?"

"Sir Wallace's."

"Go on."

"To-night after the ball, change your dress quickly for a plain dark one, and come to the French window in the library, nearest the lake. I will be there. I have secured proper people with a carriage, to be waiting below the great gates. They are perfect strangers, and have no idea who I am; therefore do not fear, dearest

dearest Milly! but trust in me now and forever, and come boldly.”

A cold shudder ran through me as I read this note, and thought of what a different day this might have been, had I chanced to read it twelve hours earlier.

For a long, long time after this, Mrs. Trevelyan lay without speaking; her eyes closed and her hands clasped, as if she were insensible: but when I moved and bent over her, she looked up and motioned me to close the blinds.

Again she was silent; but after a time, to my great astonishment, she rose slowly from her bed, and crossing the room unaided (a thing she had not done for years), went to a writing-table at the opposite side, and sat down.

I stood still, gazing at her with frightened amazement; for I should scarcely have been more surprised if I had seen the bed she had left rise up and walk. When she was seated she beckoned to me, and asked solemnly,

“Florence Sackville, do you from your very heart, as answering unto God, believe my child to be guilty?”

“I have told you all I know,” I answered, evasively.

“That is a subterfuge, and no reply,” she rejoined. “It can not cost you more to answer, than it does me to ask; but, be the pain to both what it may, I must have an answer.”

“Then I do believe it.”

“That she has sought and lured this man from his duty?”

“No, no, no!” I replied, vehemently. “She has been the victim, not the tempter. She has been tortured, taunted, worn out with petty insults and malice, till she has been all but maddened. She has been persecuted and harassed, thrown upon him at all times, forced into his society, left to hear from him the only words of sympathy and kindness that were ever spoken; and no wonder that, at last, so hemmed in on every side, she rushed from misery into ruin.”

“And was this indeed so? Is she but the sacrifice to a profligate’s deep-laid scheme?”

“No!” I answered passionately, for all discretion and thought of consequences was gone, and I spoke recklessly.

“No! bad as Sir Wallace is, the plot was not his. His was no plan, I do believe: he has himself been entangled in a net woven by another. He is a selfish, unprincipled, and self-indulgent man; but, until he says so, I will never believe that he plotted for poor Milly’s destruction. A snare was laid for both—for what diabolical reason I can not tell—and he saw it; but he only aided it in so far that he did not avoid it.”

“Who, then, do you speak of? Who else had power to plot and persecute her?”

“His wife, Lady Mowbray.”

“Are you mad, girl, to say this?” cried Mrs. Trevelyan, sternly. “Have these horrors turned your brain, that you say such things?”

“No; I am in my clear, full senses. And I believe what I have said, as firmly as I do my own existence.”

“And yet you all stood by and saw this fiendish thing done, and said nothing!”

“Pardon me! I warned and besought Milly to avoid the net that was being woven round her. I prayed and urged her, almost beyond what was delicate and fitting; but she silenced

me indignantly, relying upon her own courage and purity of intention. What could I do more?”

“You should have told me, her natural and faithful protector.”

“She forbade me: and prayed so earnestly that I would never reveal to you what she suffered, that in sympathy for her apprehensions lest you should suffer too, I could not but obey her.”

“Lest I should suffer! my poor lost child! did she so feel for me? Did she, indeed, remember me?” cried the distracted mother, and she bent her head and wept.

After a while she recovered her serenity, and said,

“I have much to do, and fain would ask your help to do it; for I must leave this place at once. Beneath this roof I will not, so it please God, sleep another night. But I must be alone for a time, having many things to think of: so go now, and return presently.”

“First, tell me again if all that you have told me is true—bare truth, I mean; not robbed or embellished truth; but plain and simple fact.”

“I believe it to be so. From my conscience, I believe every word I have spoken.”

I left the room, and went to my own, which was on the opposite side of the gallery; and from which, by leaving the door open, I could see who passed along.

To my surprise, I observed Dawson, Lady Mowbray’s maid, go almost immediately into the apartment I had just quitted; and after a few minutes I heard the door locked. The conference lasted so long, that pining for fresh air, I went down stairs and out into the grounds.

The sun was shining, and every thing looked gay and bright. Along the road, carriages were dashing by to the long talked-of races, and people as they passed looked in and stared, as if they expected to see some wonder. The story of the past night’s misfortune was evidently abroad in the world. The servants were standing together in groups, talking earnestly; and two or three great dogs, Sir Wallace’s usual outdoor companions, wandered idly about, as if they missed him.

Every thing, though the day was so radiant and glowing, looked wretched and melancholy to me; and I heartily wished that my mother and Helen had come to Mowbray, as they had promised, instead of staying at home to nurse a cold.

At last I heard the turret clock strike two, and thinking Mrs. Trevelyan must now be ready, I returned to the house, and went up-stairs.

When I reached the gallery, I was thunder-struck at distinguishing Mrs. Trevelyan’s voice, speaking, in clear, deep tones, from Lady Mowbray’s dressing-room; and, with a sudden impulse for which I can not account, I went hastily forward, and pushing open the door, that already stood ajar, entered the room.

Before me, leaning with one hand upon the table, and with the other grasping a chair—white as a marble statue, but shaking in every limb, stood Lady Mowbray; her eyes staring wide and wonderingly upon her accuser. Opposite was Mrs. Trevelyan, firm and unshaken, as if endued with superhuman strength. Her right arm was slightly extended toward her enemy, and her countenance expressed more scornful detestation

than I could have believed it possible for human features to portray.

She was speaking when I entered; and, although Lady Mowbray uttered an exclamation at seeing me, Mrs. Trevelyan never noticed my appearance by a word or glance, but went on without a pause.

"And you thought, short-sighted as you are, that your share in this most fiendish deed would have remained unknown! that you had played your part so warily as to baffle detection by human means! But you forgot those All-seeing eyes which never sleep; that keep eternal watch to bring dark mysteries to light. You forgot that, to be safe from treachery, it is needful to be innocent.

"The sins of all your guilty life I know: the plots with which, step by step, you have tortured and decoyed my child's soul to ruin. But I will not curse you. I leave you to your own conscience and to God! Scorned, despised, and avoided by all but the vilest, you will drag on your weary life alone, and end it without blessing or respect.

"The blighted face of her you have destroyed will haunt you, sleeping and waking, from this hour until your death. Try as you may, you will never escape from it: it will glare upon you from the garden flowers, as from the churchyard grave. Peace and you have taken leave of each other forever: you will never know it again on earth; for guilt, like the ocean, can have no rest.

"I am now leaving this house forever, driven from the roof of my ancestors by your heartless perfidy and cruelty. Wanderers on the face of the earth, heart-broken and wicked, have you driven forth those, into whose home you were welcomed and received. May we never meet again in this world! and may God in His infinite mercy look down and save from everlasting destruction, those whom you have betrayed and sacrificed; so that when we stand together at the eternal bar, I may not have to call upon the Judge of all, for vengeance against you for my child's lost soul!"

On uttering these words, the wretched mother turned to leave the room; but as she did so, her eyes fell upon the portrait of Milly, which hung over the door. At the sight of it, all her firmness gave way; and after a paroxysm of passionate weeping, she cried out in a transport of anguish, stretching out her arms to the picture, "My child! my darling, darling child! Where are you? If you are upon the earth, speak, and deny this horrible crime! Or, if they have killed you with the slander, appeal with me to the righteous Judge of heaven to right you. Oh, Milly! Milly! by the love and prayers of twenty long years, I implore you to come back—if but for a moment—speak to me. Milly! Milly!"

She fell upon her knees, with her eyes riveted on the portrait, as if she thought that it lived and could answer her.

"If you would not have me die here, speak! speak! Do not turn your eyes away, my child!

What secret is there, that your mother should not read? Why are they averted from me? those dear eyes that were so innocent and true. Great Heaven! what does this mean? Her face is pale and turned away! her eyelids quiver and

her lips part! Oh, Father of mercy! I ask for proof, of my child's innocence, and the canvas speaks and cries out guilt!"

As Mrs. Trevelyan uttered these despairing words, her arms, which till now had been extended imploringly to the picture, wavered in the air, then fell suddenly by her side, and, before I could support her tottering frame, she sank at our feet.

She was instantly raised, and carried back to her own room; but scarcely had we succeeded in replacing her in bed, when violent convulsions came on, which, to our terrified and inexperienced eyes, threatened instant death.

Happily, however, the village surgeon, a clever though eccentric practitioner, was speedily in attendance; and, under his able treatment, the sufferer's tortured frame at last recovered its usual appearance.

CHAPTER XXV.

As soon as Mrs. Trevelyan was in a state to be safely left to the care of a servant, Mr. Stuart beckoned me from the room, and, leading the way into an adjoining one, closed the door carefully, and asked, "What is all this about? How on earth comes Mrs. Trevelyan in this state?"

I hesitated, doubtful what to say; and he continued, impatiently,

"Pshaw! I thought you had more sense than to make a mystery where there is none! This is a waste of time. Do you really fancy, young lady, that the miserable occurrences which have taken place in this house during the last twelve hours, are not already known and talked about over half the county? If you do, you are most grievously mistaken. It's not that, I want to know; if it were, I need only go outside those gates, and ask the first man, woman, or child I met, for a full explanation. No; what I want to learn is, what immediate act of villainy or folly has reduced Mrs. Trevelyan to the condition in which I find her. Surely, in her precarious state, no one has been base enough to tell her the truth, eh?"

"How she heard it in the first instance, I do not know; but in some way or other she has become acquainted with the whole story."

"Impossible! what fiend or fool could tell her?"

"I can not tell; and, indeed, I have not the slightest idea: perhaps one of the housemaids."

"Likely enough! It's precisely the sort of thing one expects from these chattering broomsticks: they are a most pestilent set. But I think, from what you said in the room just now, that you know something more of the immediate cause of Mrs. Trevelyan's seizure, than you have told me yet. What was that you said about a picture?"

"Simply that Mrs. Trevelyan had been painfully excited by seeing a portrait of her daughter, and had fallen into a state of insensibility before it."

"Sad, very sad! whose wise doing was that?"

"Her own, I imagine: I was not in the house at the time she went into Lady Mowbray's room; and only reached it a few minutes before she fainted."

"How did she get there? To the best of my belief, she has not walked unassisted for years."

"That, too, I can not explain. I only know that early this morning I saw her rise unaided from her bed, and cross the room without the slightest support."

"Poor soul! poor soul! She will never rise again, I fear; the last hour of her life is rapidly approaching."

"Oh, do not say so! It will kill Milly to know that she has destroyed her mother; for, indeed, she loved her devotedly."

"So it appears," said the surgeon, drily.

"You do not believe me. And I do not wonder," I replied, impetuously. "Every thing is against her; and I can not expect indifferent people to credit a feeling which her actions seem to contradict. Nevertheless, what I say is true; never child loved a parent, more than Milly does her mother; and, maddened as she now is by suffering, the knowledge of Mrs. Trevelyan's death, caused by her sin, will be followed by her own. Thus this horrible tragedy will be consummated."

"Hem!" coughed the doctor, contemptuously.

I turned away angrily, for I was strongly excited; and the sight of another's calm indifference and scarcely courteous incredulity, was more than I could endure.

Nothing is more exasperating than to have one's whole heart, with its warmest hopes and fears, laid bare to the careless observation, and cold, unsympathizing scrutiny of a worldly-wise person, who looks upon the excitement he can not understand, as a sort of ridiculous insanity.

It is certainly not true, that intense and passionate emotion awakens a corresponding sympathy in others. On the contrary, it frequently happens that we plead, deprecate, entreat, or scorn, evincing real and, perhaps, agonized sincerity, yet find, after all, that we might as well have addressed a rock.

It is said that the whole secret of success lies in being in earnest. That is truth, but only half a truth; it is true as regards our own success in life, its studies and enterprises, but only partially so, as regards our influence over others. Else how could the great, the powerful, and the wealthy listen unmoved, to the despairing petitions they reject? No, if we are to influence others by the reality of our feelings, whether sufferings or joys, it must be, not by our own sincerity, but through the fortunate chance of awakening a corresponding remembrance of similar emotion in our hearer's mind.

Full of wrath, I walked angrily to the window and looked out.

"Who is going to nurse Mrs. Trevelyan?" inquired Mr. Stuart.

"I don't know," I answered, shortly.

"Of course not! That is always the way with you very enthusiastic people. You all talk very well, but as for doing any thing rational, that is quite out of the question."

I did not reply, for I was too angry to trust myself with words; therefore, with unusual wisdom, I remained silent, while he continued—

"I must see some one to whom I can give directions. Who is it to be?"

"I really can not advise."

"Very well; then, I may as well say good-morning; it is quite useless wasting my time

in a house where there is no one to leave a message with."

As he spoke, he crossed the room to the door; but he had not reached it, when my conscience smote me for my selfish indifference to the sufferer, and I said,

"I will take your message, if you can trust me."

"As you like; only, if you undertake it, be good enough not to excite yourself."

With these contemptuous words, he sat down and wrote a long prescription; he then gave me some very clear and sensible directions, and, promising to return in three hours, left the house.

As soon as he was gone, the difficulty of the position in which I had placed myself, struck me forcibly.

Every visitor, with the single exception of myself, had departed. Lady Mowbray had not intimated a wish for me to stay; and if she had, I could not tell whether my mother would, under the present circumstances, approve of it. I had no right to remain; nor had I any experience to make my presence valuable, or position in the house to give my opinion weight. Yet if I did not stay there was not one living creature who, as far as I knew, would tend the death-bed of the forsaken mother. Surely it seemed my plain duty to remain, at least for a few hours, where I was; in the hope that, as soon as the news reached Ingerdyne, I should receive advice or directions from home.

It was late that night before the stupor into which Mrs. Trevelyan had sunk, after the violence of the convulsion, passed even partially away; and when Mr. Stuart again saw her, he gave but little hope that she would ever recover her senses fully. In this, however, he was mistaken; for, toward noon the following day, she opened her eyes, and looking at me, as I sat beside her, recognized me at once.

For several minutes she did not speak; seeming to be entirely occupied with the endeavor to recall to her memory all that had passed. But at last she whispered, in a voice so weak that I was compelled to bend my head closely down to distinguish her words,

"Milly!—Any tidings?"

"None. But do not think of that now; we must wait patiently."

She moved her head sorrowfully, but made no reply, and, after a little time, I saw tears welling through the closed eyelashes and falling heavily upon the pillow. One pale, emaciated hand lay upon the counterpane, and, moved with an impulse of pity and sympathy, I took it gently in my own and kissed it. An affectionate pressure answered to the action, and, without opening her eyes, or wiping away the trickling tears, she lay for many minutes with her hand locked in mine. At last she said, faintly,

"I am very ill, Florence. I fear that I am dying, and that my own impatience under God's chastisement is hastening my end. This must not be, or death will not be peace. It is impossible, unless by a miracle, that I can live more than a very few days; let us pray to our Heavenly Father that those days may be spent in submission to His will. Bring that Prayer-book, Florence, and read to me."

I did so; and, as I concluded, a note w

brought to me. When Mrs. Trevelyan saw it, the gleam of hope brightened and lighted up her sunken eyes with new life; but it was destined to fade away in disappointment. I said as quickly as I could—

"It is from Ingerdyne; from my mother." Oh, the misery of the deep sigh which answered me! It was heart-rending.

My mother's letter was brief and angry; chiding me for remaining so long, and bidding me return without delay.

"What does Mrs. Sackville say?" asked the sufferer, anxiously, for she saw by my countenance that my letter was a painful one. "I hope she is not ill."

"Oh, no; but—" I hesitated to tell the ungracious truth—"she wishes me to return home; I fancy that she wants me to see some one who is expected at Ingerdyne—and I have been away so much this summer," I added, apologetically.

"But a few days longer, Florence! I shall not be here more—a very few days! Surely she will spare you that little while, to close my eyes."

"I will ask, certainly," I replied; "not for the sad purpose you fear, but that I may add some little to your comfort."

"God bless you, Florence!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, solemnly. "A forsaken mother's blessing be on you now and ever! As you have ministered to me in my desolation, so shall you, at your need, be ministered unto."

I was powerfully excited; and bodily fatigue, added to the many and painful emotions I had lately endured, seemed to have utterly unnerved me. As she spoke, my head sank upon the bed, and I wept unrestrainedly.

While we remained in this state, Mr. Stuart entered; and, after congratulating his patient upon the improvement in her symptoms, insisted upon knowing what was the matter with me. "Nothing," I replied, thanklessly; for I had not forgiven him for his words and manner the day before.

"Nothing! That's a regular young lady's ailment. Then what do you cry about it for? Is 'nothing' enough to send you down upon your knees, and swell your eyes out of your head, and turn your face like the cook's, eh? 'Nothing,' indeed! Such 'nothings' help to fill the church-yard."

"She has received a summons from home," explained the invalid.

"Eh? What?" cried the little man, turning round like a teetotum. "Summoned home! And you call that *nothing*? In the name of common sense! if you call leaving a dying woman without a nurse or friend, *nothing*—what do you think worth calling *something*? Eh, Miss Sackville, eh?"

I don't know what possessed me that day, unless it was the weakness of over-fatigue; but at these words, like a simpleton, I burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears.

"Crying again! crying again!" exclaimed the doctor. "God bless me! what is there to cry for? Is this a part of the 'nothing,' or have you begun to find out that it is a more serious *thing* than you took it for? I can't understand such contradictions at all. Pray, young lady, *what is it you want?* To go home, or not?"

"She wishes to stay with me," said Mrs. Tre-

velyan, gently; "but she is not her own mistress, and must write home to obtain permission."

"Write home! My dear good lady, what a woman's idea of doing business that is! If you want a thing *done*, go; if you want it refused, write."

"I fear that if Florence went, her mother might be still more unwilling to part with her."

"Very likely. But can nobody else go? Where is her home?"

"At Ingerdyne, three miles from—"

"Ingerdyne! Ingerdyne!" cried Mr. Stuart, who had a great habit of repeating the last words of other people's speeches. "Are you any relation to the late Mr. Veré?"

"Only his grand-daughter," I answered, coolly.

"Is it possible? Daughter of his daughter, of course. What a remarkable thing! And you wish to stay and nurse Mrs. Trevelyan? So you shall. I'll go over to Ingerdyne myself."

"Bless me! it is thirty years since I was there. How every thing must be changed! Still I'll go, and bring you back the leave you want; so write a note to your mother to say what you require, and you shall have an answer before midnight."

Perfectly amazed at the vehemence of the little doctor, I stood for a moment gazing at him, with wonder, and some faint suspicion that he had lost his senses; but in a minute, he said,

"You are puzzled, I see, and curious. All women are; and I know it's hopeless to expect any thing to be properly done, while you are in that state. You want to learn what I know of Ingerdyne and your late grandfather, to excite me to ride forty miles on an errand for you at a moment's notice: well, I'll tell you."

"Many, many years ago, my father, whose unhappy propensity for gambling led him at times into very evil company, became possessed of a check signed in Mr. Vere's name; which, when he presented it for payment at the banker's, was discovered to be a forgery. It was in vain that he protested his innocence of any guilty knowledge, or part in the forgery; as he refused to give the name of the man from whom he had received it, he was of course arrested."

"I was then a boy of little more than twelve years of age; but I remember every circumstance of that horrible time, when the news first came to our home, as well as if it had happened yesterday."

My mother was frantic with grief and shame, and taking me with her to the prison where my father lay, implored him, on her knees, to tell her from whom he had received the fatal paper. He refused: and although she was convinced of his integrity, no one else was; and the fearful preparations for his trial went on.

"I well recollect my mother's state of alternate despair and frenzy, during the period which elapsed from the time of her husband's arrest, until the day she resolved to see Mr. Vere. I was with her the whole time. I never left her day or night; for I was her only child, then, and, young as I was, she clung to me as to her sole consolation."

It was at night that the idea of moving Mr. Vere to mercy, first occurred to her; and she aroused me from the little bed upon which I slept

beside her, bidding me rise and come with her instantly. At first I was frightened, thinking that sorrow had affected her intellects; but as soon as she discovered the fears which kept me aloof gazing at her, she sat quietly down, and in a few words told me her plan and her hopes. I acquiesced in both—as what else, so young as I was, could I do?—and we set off from London. We had very little money; for, although my father's practice at the bar had been a profitable one, yet the small income he allowed my mother for her household expenses had been almost entirely forestalled. However, between walking and riding, we reached Ingerdyne at last.

"My heart sank as we were ushered into a large library, and were desired to wait for Mr. Vere's arrival. It was a noble room; I had never seen any thing so well appointed before; but I only gazed round a moment, and taking my mother's cold hand in mine, held it tight, fixing my eyes upon her pale face.

"She returned the caress fondly; but neither of us spoke: we had lost courage even to break the silence, by the sound of our own voices. At last, tired I suppose of the stillness, a parrot, which we had not noticed, said, suddenly,

"Good-morning! You're welcome! Take a chair."

"My mother started to her feet. The tones were so human, that she fancied they were those of some member of the family; and only when they were repeated, with the peculiar chuckle of the bird, did she discover whence the voice came. Like you just now, young lady; for no cause that I could understand, my mother burst into tears, calling the poor silly parrot's words an omen; and, while I was vainly trying to comfort her, Mr. Vere entered.

"My mother was, even at this time, although so crushed with grief and woe, both beautiful in face and graceful in manner; and your grandfather was instantly prepossessed in her favor. In a very little time his courteous attention restored her to composure; and, in a more collected manner than she had spoken for weeks, she told her errand, and begged for mercy for her husband.

"When she first commenced her story, and at the mention of her name, Mr. Vere's brow grew dark, and he frowned ominously; but at last, moved by her agony, and impressed by her perfect confidence in her husband's integrity, the angry look relaxed, and he began to listen favorably.

"It is a very large sum of money to lose, and a heinous crime to pardon," I remember, he said.

"It is," replied my mother; "but large as it is, were it a thousand times told, it could not compensate, either to you or me, for the loss of an innocent life. And the crime is so heinous, that you should be very certain that you are right, before you fix its stigma upon the name of a man who solemnly denies it. Remember that, in a few days, all the proofs of innocence that the world can offer, will be useless."

"I will see your husband, and for the sake of your sorrow, and your boy's future respectability, promise that, if he will tell me in confidence from whom he received the check, I will pledge myself to take no further steps in the

matter: I will not only save him, but let the guilty escape. I really can and ought to do no more."

"Then there is no hope!" exclaimed my mother, mournfully, "for he never broke his word when once given, and I know that he would sooner die ten deaths, than save his life by what he will consider an act of dishonor."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Mr. Vere, eagerly. "Can a gambler have any such sense of honor left?"

"Yes! I would stake my existence upon his integrity and good faith. He is as innocent of this crime as I am; but I know he will never preserve his life at the expense of his word."

"Then I will save him!" said Mr. Vere, impetuously. "If you are right, he ought not to be cut off, without an opportunity of reform; if you are wrong, the consequences of your mistake will fall more heavily upon you than upon any one else."

"I can't tell what followed this, exactly; for my poor mother, after a woman's usual fashion, went into hysterics as soon as she had attained her wishes; and I was too bewildered with contending feelings to know at all clearly what passed afterward.

"Your good old grandfather was true to his word. When the day of trial came, there was neither prosecutor nor evidence forthcoming; and the accused was of course discharged.

"An interview took place immediately between my father and Mr. Vere, and so strongly was the latter impressed with a belief of the barrister's innocence, that he offered him such assistance as enabled him to leave England, and study the medical profession, under a feigned name, in Germany.

"Several years afterward, a man condemned to death for forgery upon a northern bank, confessed the day before his execution, that among many similar frauds which he had committed, was the very check which my father had been accused of forging. It was now proved to have reached his hands through those of another dupe; who, like himself, had been wholly innocent of any guilty knowledge.

"The first intelligence which reached us of this happy discovery, was brought to us by Mr. Vere himself; who traveled to Brussels for the express purpose. His joy was scarcely less than ours; but all his entreaties to my father to return to England were unavailing. During our exile my father had, as a physician, prospered greatly; his family too was much increased, and as he had none but painful remembrances attached to the land of his birth, he preferred remaining where he was.

"Before his death, however, I came to England, and purchased my practice here; which I have followed ten years, without knowing, until this day, how near I am to Ingerdyne.

"You understand now, why I should like to serve Mr. Vere's grand-daughter, even in a whim; and perhaps will tell me, if I am likely to succeed?"

"Only tell my mother what you have just told us, and I am sure you are. She never refuses any thing asked in her father's name."

"Then make haste; say as little as you can in your note, and have it ready by the time I return, which will be exactly in a quarter of an

hour from this minute : it is half-past one now; I shall be here at a quarter to two."

Precisely at the time he had fixed, Mr. Stuart opened the door of Mrs. Trevelyan's room. Seeing the note in his hand, he gave a little nod of approbation, then walked up to the patient's bed, felt her pulse, asked one or two questions, repeated twice over to me a few plain directions—particularly cautioning me against allowing either visitors or excitement—and then took his leave.

Fortunately Mrs. Trevelyan slept nearly the whole of the afternoon and evening; so that, relieved from attendance, I was enabled to lie down upon a sofa close to the bed and sleep too. Toward midnight, however, she became restless, and at times delirious, fancying she saw Milly; while I, at that time, unused to a sick-room, and the variations of disease, grew wretchedly nervous and frightened.

At length, to my great relief, I heard the hall bell ring, and in a few minutes after, the little doctor made his appearance in the room. The sound of the opening and closing door, aroused the patient instantly; and with a wild burst of hysterical laughter, which thrilled through us all with its unnatural sound, she greeted Mr. Stuart's entrance.

"Bad! bad! very bad, indeed!" he said to himself, while watching the poor sufferer's convulsed features lighted up with the horrible glare of delirium.

"What has she been doing? who has seen or spoken to her, since I left this morning?"

"No one, but Jane and myself. She slept until nine o'clock, and ever since has been at intervals as you see. I have never left the room since I gave you my note to-day."

"Ah! that's right! I don't want you to do much; only to see that others do their duty. And now, while I attend to my patient, do you read this note from your mother."

I did so: it conveyed a permission to stay at Mowbray for a few days more, if my services were *absolutely necessary* to Mrs. Trevelyan; but the hour they became otherwise, I was to return.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DURING all this distressing time, Lady Mowbray never visited the room; nor had I, since the first morning, asked a single question respecting her. By the death-bed of her victim, how could I care for the traitress whose machinations had resulted thus?

The faculties and strength of the poor suffering mother were completely overpowered; and in a state of convulsion and delirium, alternating with stupor, Mrs. Trevelyan passed three long heavy days.

On the fourth, there was a great, and to me hopeful change: memory and resignation returned, the pain of which the patient had at first complained was gone, and the features lost their mournful and anxious look. In great delight I remarked upon this improvement to Mr. Stuart, but he only shook his head, muttering,

"A short rest before an eternal one!"

That evening, when we were quite alone, Mrs. Trevelyan said to me, in the sweet quiet tones of old,

"Draw up the blinds, Florence, and tie back the curtains; I wish to see the sun set: I have a strong impression that I shall never look upon the scene again."

I obeyed, and as the blinds were rolled up, a flood of ruddy golden sunlight fell upon the sufferer's pallid face, investing it with an unearthly and solemn radiance.

In a large mirror nearly opposite her bed, Mrs. Trevelyan's eye caught the reflection of her figure, and its glorious halo; which, with a peculiar smile, she pointed out to me, saying,

"In olden times they would have called that an omen."

"Of what?" I asked.

"A speedy and happy release from sorrow."

"Then pray let us follow the example. You are so much better to-night, that I think we may very reasonably hope the omen will be soon fulfilled."

"Not on earth, Florence! In this world there is no exemption from sorrow. It is only when, dying in the faith of Christ, we shake off our mortality, that we escape suffering. But even so, I dare to hope that I shall be soon at rest. My life, like this long painful day, is closing fast."

"You should not say so: you are weak and fanciful, or you would know how much better you are to-night."

"I am sorry you think so, Florence, because you are preparing for yourself a great disappointment. Believe one who has been watching the approach of death for ten years, that but a very few hours now lie between her and his actual presence."

I could make no reply; for her voice, so hollow and sweet, lent a sad impressiveness to her words, and forced upon me the belief, that they were prophetic.

"Do not grieve, Florence!" she said tenderly; "rather rejoice that, from a world which could now be to me nothing but a scene of shame and grief, God in his abundant mercy is taking me so soon. I feel quite strong to-night: unusually so; and I think it is a strength lent to me for some great purpose, although as yet I know not what. But while it remains with me, I wish to thank you with all my power for the watchful, untiring, and loving care you have bestowed upon me."

"Do not interrupt me: I know what you would say; but until you are as desolate, heart-crushed, and bereaved as I am, you can never appreciate the comfort your presence has been. Still, although the benefit has been priceless to me, I trust that in rendering it, you will be profited also."

"You are young, ardent, and enthusiastic; full of the gayety of life and health; and it may be well that, for a time, you should be called from the enjoyments of existence to look upon a death-bed. You are handsome and attractive, gifted with more than usual talents, and intrusted by God with generous and noble impulses: be careful how you use them. They are great blessings, but they are great temptations also: you have seen them all possessed by one, whose early education should have taught her how to watch and control them, and you have seen her fall."

"Oh, Florence! if she, once so gentle, humble, and truthful; so guarded and prayed for; so

tenderly loved, and religiously educated, could fall from virtue and holiness, do you take heed! The purest, truest heart on earth can not be more innocent and guileless than my unhappy child's was, a few brief months since; and even now, when the near approach of death enlarges and clears all moral perceptions, enabling us to see vice unmasked, in all its monstrous and hideous proportions—even now, I do believe that her crime is less guilt than madness; and that, purified by chastisement and penitence on earth, I shall yet meet her in heaven."

"And from my heart I believe it too," I answered fervently.

"May God, in His abundant mercy and compassion, grant it to my prayers!" rejoined the mother, solemnly.

"And now, Florence," she resumed, after a short silence, "I wish to leave in your charge a message to my poor lost child. I implore you to find some means of delivering it to her, when I am gone. Will you?"

"If it is possible, I will. I may not be able to discover her very soon, but I promise you that no effort shall be left untried to do so, as speedily as can be: sooner or later, if she and I live, she shall have your message faithfully."

As I spoke, Mrs. Trevelyan's eyes, which had been fixed upon my face, as if there to discover the sincerity of my promise, closed. Her lips moved as if in prayer, and for many minutes she was silent.

Then, turning toward me, she pointed to a dressing-case upon the table, and bade me take from it two small miniatures. When I had done so, and given them to her, she opened the cases, and gazed long and tearfully at the portraits: then returning them to me, she said,

"Give these, with my blessing, to my child. Tell her they are the resemblances of her dead parents; and bid her, from the dying lips of the last surviving one, to repent—earnestly and at once—as she hopes to meet them again in heaven.

"Tell her, that with my last breath I prayed for her pardon to Almighty God; and, with a firm hope and belief that she would seek His mercy by immediate penitence and humiliation before Him, I left her my blessing. Tell her, that, by the memory of her early and innocent life, I implored her to reflect upon the awful course she is pursuing.

"Oh, Florence! plead with her, in my name, as you would for your own soul, that she will pause at once; and that, with God to help her, she will, even at the sacrifice of all she now holds dearest, repent and return to the path of virtue she has left. Warn her that vice never brings happiness, that peace can only be found in the ways of righteousness; and entreat her, as she hopes for mercy beyond the grave, to listen to the voice which, through you, speaks from the dead.

"It may be, Florence, that you will see her but once; that upon that one interview will rest her fate forever: think of this when the time comes, and remember how much depends upon your energy and zeal. It may be the last opportunity vouchsafed to her by God. Promise me, that you will exert every power you possess to improve it to the utmost—that you will spare no remonstrance or entreaty to save her."

"I do promise, with all my soul!"

"Do not be repulsed by careless words or angry looks. Do not be offended at slights or even affront, but persevere to the end. Remember that the unjust judge yielded to pertinacity what he denied to justice; so do you have courage and persist, looking to your reward hereafter. Will you, Florence, undertake this most solemn charge?"

"I will; and, with God's help, perform it honestly."

"Do not be too stern with her, Florence," said the poor mother, in a voice now choked with tears: "she is of a gentle, tender spirit, and would die under a rude hand. She has been so cherished and beloved, that what less sensitive natures would never feel at all, will crush her utterly.

"When she hears that I have passed away, her conscience will upbraid her; she will forget the health broken for years, and with a merciless remorse will accuse herself of my death. Save her from that misery: tell her, that to the last I loved and blessed her, and that I died in the firm belief that her penitence would reunite us. Tell her, that never have I thought harshly of her, but sorrowfully, and with unabated affection; and when her heart is touched with that assurance, and softened by remembrance of old days with all their holy memories, then speak to her gently and lovingly of repentance.

"To you, as to a sister, I confide her; and as you would have others keep faith with you, do you fulfil the charge I now bequeath to you—mercifully and lovingly, yet fearlessly."

"Do not doubt me. If I live, I will do your bidding; if I die, I will leave it in good hands."

"I am satisfied. And now, Florence, read to me the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. I am weary, and would fain be at rest."

After a short time, the faint regular breathing of the sleeper warned me to close my book; and I leaned back in the large invalid chair, watching the gathering twilight, and thinking of the responsibility I had just undertaken.

Before night had quite set in, Mr. Stuart came noiselessly into the room, and, beckoning me to be silent, gently lifted up the patient's wan, white hand, and felt her pulse. There was still light enough left to show how pale and drawn her features were; and, with a half sigh, the doctor turned from the bed, and going to the door motioned to me to follow him.

"Who sits up with you to-night?" he asked, abruptly.

"No one. I have arranged to have a bed made upon the sofa for myself; and, as Mrs. Trevelyan is so much better, I shall do very well alone."

"She is *not* better. Haven't you heard the old woman's tale of people's senses returning to them just before death? She is as much better as that; no more."

"But she is so quiet; so rational and collected; so different to what she was yesterday and the day before. She can not surely be so near death!"

"Those are all so many proofs that she is. Her pulse has sunk fatally, and her face is gathered into the lines which are never seen upon the cheeks and mouth of the living, until the last. Death has set his seal upon her."

I staggered, and should have fallen against the

gallery baluster, but for Mr. Stuart's arm, which he extended to save me, saying, at the same time—"Are you frightened, that you tremble so? I told you from the first that she could not recover?"

"Yes, yes; but I did not think it was to be so soon—so very, very soon. She has not been ill a week."

"You calculate by an original almanac, I imagine, Miss Sackville. I have attended her myself for five years; and she descended to me from my deceased partner, whose patient she has been for at least ten. She has long been in such a state as to place her life in immediate danger from any sudden shock she might receive; and surely the blows she has experienced lately would have been sufficient to destroy even a stronger person. My only astonishment is, that she has lasted so long." It is wonderful what women can bear!"

"Then you think there is no hope?" I asked, mournfully.

"None," he answered, decidedly. "Nor can any thing more be done. The only service she is now capable of receiving, is that most difficult one of all for friends to render—the mercy of being *let alone*. Attention will only disturb her; and any attempt to invigorate or restore her will be both useless and cruel."

"What, then, do you wish me to do?"

"Nothing. Lie quietly on the sofa, as you proposed, and have some steady person in the room, in case Mrs. Trevelyan is worse—some one who is collected and silent: a deaf and dumb person would be just the thing, if you had such a treasure."

"There is no one in the house whom I could trust; and, after what you have said, indeed, I dare not be alone. I must have some one with me, or I can not stay in the room."

"Nonsense! nonsense! What is there to fear? But if you really have nobody who is to be depended upon to keep the room quiet (and there will be nothing else to be done to-night), I will send you a nurse of my own training, upon whom I can rely. Would you like it?"

"Oh, yes! But do you really think there is any immediate danger—to-night, I mean?"

"No; it is possible, but I do not expect it; though it is right that you should be prepared. I will give the nurse all needful directions, and do you go to bed quietly, as you suggested. You will not be wanted, and will be better asleep."

In about an hour the woman arrived—and a perfect pattern she was of a model nurse. She was short, fat, and red-faced, and attired in a black silk gown, white apron, and a tremendous cap.

The instant she came into the room, she began to set it to rights—that is, she put every thing out of its place, arranging all the articles upon the toilet, writing-table, and sofa, in the most extraordinary and out-of-the-way positions. Every towel and basket-cover she unwrapped and folded up afresh. She put every chair in a new situation; and every book she opened and carefully removed to a different locality; in short, before she had been half-an-hour in the room, she had made it most particularly uncomfortable, having rendered it almost impossible to find any thing that was wanted.

After every thing had been disarranged to her

perfect satisfaction, and she had demolished the whole of the eatables upon a well-furnished supper-tray, she drew a large chair to the side of the bed, added two more (much in the same fashion that children do, when they make coaches), and, with a whisper to me that she should be sure to hear if the "poor dear" stirred, she doffed her lace-cap for a calico one, with portentous borders, and resigned herself to sleep.

In a little while the breathing of the sleepers was the only sound that broke the stillness, and I sat mournfully alone; every now and then wondering, in the midst of gloomy thoughts and sad anticipations, what earthly good this fat, fidgety nurse had done, or was expected to do. If she had come to relieve me, certainly she had not fulfilled her mission; for the sole use she was of at present, was to keep me awake by her snoring.

However, as even that was preferable to her conversation, I resigned myself as well as I could to the prospect of another night's watching, and tried to occupy myself with reading.

But of this I soon tired, for I could not fix my attention to the book; my thoughts were wandering far away; and at last I closed the volume, and allowed them full liberty.

Oh, what a solemn, dreary night that was!—even now, I can close my eyes and bring the whole scene before me.

The room was very large, and, like many others in the house, was wainscoted with oak. Several of the panels were filled by grim, black-looking portraits of the old Mowbrays; and in all possible places large mirrors were let into the walls, reflecting the stern faces of their late owners. The bed was immense; almost as wide and long as a small room; it was draped with tapestry, representing a boar-hunt in a royal forest, and at the head, immediately behind the pillows, was worked in bright colors, the death and flowing blood of the animal. Upon a centre table, well shaded from the sleeper's eyes, burned a candle, which just lighted the room sufficiently to magnify its proportions mysteriously, and fill one's mind with all sorts of vague fears of the dark recesses.

In the bed—pale, emaciated, with features drawn and altered—lay Mrs. Trevelyan. Every now and then her eyes opened, and wandered round without seeming to see any thing; then closed, looking as if there was no strength in the lids, and they fell wearily. Her breathing was very low and faint; and at times the breath seemed to be drawn heavily, causing me to start forward, fearing lest she was choking.

In this way, the night grew on, older and older; I shivered with cold and nervous apprehension. After awhile, my eyes fixed themselves involuntarily upon the white, glaring teeth of the tortured boar, and I could scarcely repress a scream, as I saw Mrs. Trevelyan's large glassy eyes open and shut immediately beneath the animal; there seemed to my disturbed fancy to be some horrible and mysterious connection between the two sufferers. If I turned my head away, in some half-dozen mirrors at once I saw the whole room reflected; and after a time it was almost difficult not to believe that all the pictures were animated; and that, gliding about me in all directions, were the unearthly representatives of the family.

In this wretched state of excitement, a weary time passed on; I dared neither move nor breathe freely; and I do believe I should have fainted from terror, had not I fallen asleep gazing fixedly upon the bed.

I was awakened by Mrs. Trevelyan turning restlessly, and murmuring my name. In a moment I was beside her; and, inexperienced as I was, I saw that a change for the worse had taken place.

"Milly! Milly!" she whispered, faintly, looking at me earnestly, as if to recall to my mind the promise I had made.

"I remember," said I. "Your message shall be given to her, if God spares my life to do it."

She pressed my hand, and spoke some indistinct words, which I could not understand.

The sound of my voice aroused the nurse, and, with a very unexpected promptitude, she quickly stood by the bed, holding a glass of some reviving cordial in her hand.

In a gentle and skillful manner, the result of long practice, she raised the patient's head, and administered the medicine; the beneficial effects of which were soon apparent, in the brightened eye and clear voice of the patient.

"Now, Miss," said the woman, "do you lie down and have a sleep; I've had a most an hour, I dare say (she had had at least four), an' I'll watch now."

"Do, Florence," whispered Mrs. Trevelyan; and thus urged—especially as the appearance which had alarmed me had vanished—I lay down.

I had not, however, been asleep long, when I awoke at the sound of moving feet, and, upon looking up, I saw by the gray struggling light of the morning, that the terrible look had returned to the patient's face, and that some awful change was at hand.

In a moment I was by her side; her breathing was labored, and at intervals the horrible death-rattle choked her. She evidently knew me, and wished to speak, but had not the power. I fell upon my knees beside her, and lifted her hand affectionately, while tears fell fast down my face. She smiled faintly and tenderly, and signed to us to raise her, and give her more cordial. She was obeyed; and then had strength to say to me:

"Pardon and blessing to my child!—full forgiveness to all!"

At this moment, carriage-wheels dashed up to the door, announcing, as I thought, the arrival of the doctor; but Mrs. Trevelyan, as if warned by a mysterious instinct of some approaching trial, and nerved by Providence to meet it, started up in her bed, and cried, eagerly,

"Milly! Milly!"

In a few moments the door was hastily thrown open, and, with a scream, Milly rushed in, and threw herself into her mother's arms, exclaiming:

"Forgive me! forgive me! Oh, do not curse me, mother!"

Mrs. Trevelyan tried to speak, and her eyes brightened with an unearthly light, as she gasped out,

"God pardon and bless—" but here her voice failed, and, relaxing her hold of her child, she struggled slightly, and, with a deep groan, fell back lifeless.

At the same moment a crimson stream spreading itself rapidly over the bed, from the spot where Milly had fallen, warned us of some fresh catastrophe; and when the nurse lifted her head from her mother's body, we found that she had broken a blood-vessel. Her life was ebbing fast away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEFORE much could be done for good or ill, Mr. Stuart, who had been sent for by the nurse some time previously, entered the room. At once comprehending the scene, he went to Milly's relief. But all his efforts were vain: very slowly, but steadily, the life-blood flowed away; and in a short time the cold death-damps came out upon her pallid brow.

I sat by her, and held her hand, and, with my own eyes full of tears, looked upon the melancholy brilliancy of hers. Her white lips were drawn into thin, straight lines, across the glittering teeth, and her face was so worn and altered, that she looked at least ten years older than when she left Mowbray, while round her eyes and mouth was a deep purple tinge.

Never was there so complete a wreck of youthful beauty!—and, as I gazed upon her, I could not refrain from thanking God that Mrs. Trevelyan had been spared the agony of watching her daughter's life thus pass away.

Although far too weak to talk, the anguish of her countenance, and its inquiring, though deprecating looks, were painfully eloquent.—There needed no words to tell what was passing in the mind of the dying girl, nor that her soul pined for knowledge of her mother's pardon. All that language could have spoken, was written in the aching gaze of her straining eyes, as she fixed them upon me.

I dared not speak, for Mr. Stuart had warned me that the slightest exertion or excitement would cause instant death, accelerating the flow of blood; and, as he had left the room to prepare some fresh styptics, I feared to utter a syllable. However, he soon returned, and after administering the medicine, and peremptorily forbidding Milly to speak, he said to me,

"I am going to sit by that window; if you have any thing to say to Miss Trevelyan, do so in as few and calm words as possible."

And thus permitted, I repeated the message with which I had been intrusted; adding, as I wept over the sufferer—"Your being here, Milly, proves that you are penitent; and your mother's spirit, speaking (she bade me tell you) from my lips, prays God to bless and pardon you, as she did."

At this moment—warned, I suppose, by one of the domestics, of the events of the night, and for the first time—Lady Mowbray entered the room. A cry of anguish, causing Mr. Stuart to rush forward, broke from the lips of poor Milly, as her eyes fell upon her cousin's wife; and, raising herself with a sudden strength, she clasped her hands in agony, exclaiming,

"Forgive me! forgive me!"

But her ladyship, though evidently shocked, was not of such an impulsive nature or so Christian a spirit as to be moved to forgiveness: she

stood aloof, looking upon the scene with the calm, mocking smile of a demon.

The blood was fast pouring from Milly's mouth, and her eyes were sinking back into their sockets; but their dying gaze was fixed imploringly upon Lady Mowbray, as she continued to gurgle forth the words, "Forgive! forgive!"

I was supporting Milly, and my arms and shoulders were covered with the frightful evidence of her suffering; while I speedily found by her increasing weight, that death was at hand. Milly's anguish so wrung my heart, and the heartless conduct of Lady Mowbray so roused my indignation, that I called angrily to Mr. Stuart,

"Send that woman away: she is killing Milly! God and her mother have pardoned her, and she shall not be tortured in her dying moments by the wretch whose treachery led her into sin, and who now exults in her agony and remorse."

"Miss Sackville! Miss Sackville!" remonstrated the doctor.

"It is true—it is true! Judge for yourself! Who but a fiend would stand there smiling, when a dying penitent implores pardon?"

At these words Mr. Stuart turned, and apparently saw enough in the countenance of her ladyship to disgust him; for, with his usual quick, positive manner, he said, going up to her,

"Allow me to lead your ladyship from the room. I can not suffer any patient, in any circumstances, who is under my care, to undergo the torture. Your conduct, madam, is cruel."

"You are insolent, sir!" exclaimed Lady Mowbray, reddening with anger. "I do not know by whom you were summoned here; but it was without my authority, and I request you will now leave my house at once. I will not be insulted," she added, passionately.

"As soon as the duty for which I came is done, I shall retire from your ladyship's house with pleasure. In the mean time I must insist upon your leaving this room."

Scarcely had the doctor's words been uttered a moment, when his attention was called to Milly; who, choking with the hemorrhage, was again struggling convulsively for breath.

"Save her—save her! Oh, Mr. Stuart, for the love of Heaven, save her," I cried, as the poor girl's dying eyes looked imploringly into mine.

"Silence—silence!" replied he, sternly: "you distract us all by such exclamations. I am doing all I can."

A sweet, thankful smile, like a shadow of the past, crossed Milly's face, as she turned it in her agony upon the surgeon. Touched by its beauty, as every one within its influence had ever been, he leaned over to me, and seizing my hand, pressed it, at the same time saying, gruffly,

"Don't mind my being cross. You're a good girl after all; but don't be so vehement."

At last but only for a few seconds, the blood was stanchcd, and in a voice so low that we could scarcely hear it, Milly murmured,

"Pray for me!"

Releasing her from our arms, Mr. Stuart and I knelt reverently beside her; and he then, in words the beauty and eloquence of which I have

never heard surpassed, solemnly implored God's pardon on the dying girl.

The prayer was scarcely concluded, when the hemorrhage broke forth afresh: and, after a few torturing minutes during which, with strained and staring eyes, she struggled painfully for breath, the spirit of the heart-broken and penitent sufferer passed sorrowfully away.

Scarcely more alive than those beloved ones whom I left to the last care of the nurse, I was led by Mr. Stuart from the chamber of death. The next day I was summoned to attend the coroner's jury, and give what evidence I could respecting the death I had witnessed.

Very few questions were asked, and those were as briefly answered; the coroner being a very old friend of the Mowbrays and Mrs. Trevelyan, and therefore anxious to avoid entering into the painful details more fully than was absolutely essential.

But the jury, many of them farmers in the neighborhood, who had known Milly from childhood, were not so easily satisfied; and by them Mr. Stuart was subjected to a very searching examination, which ended in their attaching to their verdict of "Died from the rupture of a blood-vessel," a few words of indignant reproof to Lady Mowbray for her conduct to the deceased during the last bitter moments of her life.

As soon as this distressing business was over, I left Mowbray. And as I looked up, for the last time, to the closed windows of the house so lately echoing with gayety and joy, and reflected upon the death and desolation wrought by the sin of its owner, the first real sense of God's retributive justice entered my heart, and made it tremble.

When I returned to Ingerdyne, I found my father in London, and was surprised to learn that, during my absence, most of the old servants had been dismissed, and were replaced by young inexperienced ones, fewer in number, and any thing but accustomed to such work as now fell to their lot.

"What has been the matter?" I asked of Helen; for my mother evidently shunned the question. "Why are Reynolds and Baker, and Sally and old George gone? and who chose these awkward creatures?"

"Papa. He sent away the old servants because he said, they were idle and extravagant; but I believe the reason was, that he couldn't pay them."

"Nonsense, Helen! who put that idea into your head?"

"Reynolds. I hear her say to Baker, that it was well poor grandpapa couldn't see how things were going on, for he would break his heart. 'We are leaving to-day,' she said: 'it will be the family's turn next, for the captain can't pay half his debts.'"

"Poor mamma!"

"Why, Flor., you don't believe it's as bad as that! At the worst it will only be to shut up the place for a few years, and go abroad like the Combertons. Papa's not poor, only a little harassed, I dare say."

"I'm afraid he is, Helen. I fear and believe that matters are quite as bad as Reynolds says, and that they are coming to a crisis."

"What do you mean, Florence? You frighten me!"

"I know so little of business, that I scarcely know myself what I mean; but my fear is that we shall soon leave here forever."

"Forever! Oh, Florence! how can you be so cruel? How can you say such dreadful things? I shall die if I have to go away forever, I am sure I shall."

"I hope not Helen; for, indeed, I believe that you will be tried ere long."

"Why? why do you believe so?"

"Because I have long feared that the expenses here and in London, were far more than could be afforded; and I know that tradesmen in the town, have applied time after time for their bills, without receiving them."

"So they do every where, I dare say."

"Perhaps so. But how does that make our case better, Helen?"

"I don't know; but I never will believe that we shall have to leave here, for more than a year or two at the most, and I shouldn't mind that. I should like to go to Italy, especially if we went to Rome, and lived near the Combertons. I think I should enjoy it very much, shouldn't you?"

"No; I would rather stay here than in any other place in the world. I love Ingerdyne with all my heart."

"So do I, to live in when one's old; but now, when we are girls, I should delight to go abroad. Yes; nothing like old Ingerdyne when we are old too; except a visit of three or four years to Italy. Do you know, Florence, that now I think of all this, I am rather glad of these temporary difficulties."

"Are you, Helen? You do not know what poverty is, or you would not say so."

"Poverty! Going to Rome for a few years is not poverty, surely. If it is, I should like it very much."

The day after this conversation, I discovered that the carriage and horses, which had been given to my mother by her father after his wife's death, were absent; and upon inquiring about them from a groom, was told that they had been sent to London by his master's orders.

There was something very strange, not only in the words the man used to convey this information, but in his manner too; for it seemed to intimate that there were even worse purposes to which things could be put, than their sale. I was frightened and perplexed, as well as indignant at this appropriation of my mother's especial property, and returned to the house in a very angry mood.

When I reached it, I was met by a servant with a message from my mother, requesting me to speak to a person who had called upon some business, for which he required to see one of the family. I went into the library, where I found a perfect stranger.

He seemed slightly embarrassed upon seeing me, although he bowed courteously as he rose from the chair he had taken. I was in one of my proudest and most disagreeable tempers, caused by anger at what I had just heard, so I bent my head carelessly, and waited for him to speak."

"Miss Sackville, I presume," he said at last. I bowed.

"My business is with your father; but as it appears that he is absent, I should wish to see Mrs. Sackville. May I have that honor?"

"My mother is particularly engaged, and, therefore, has desired me to attend you, and receive any message you may wish to send."

"My errand is business of a most urgent nature, and scarcely admits of a message."

"Can I not do then, as well as my mother? I am not more unused to business than she is."

"I think not. I wanted to consult her, how a most painful *exposé* of your father's affairs could be avoided, and I imagine that you could scarcely answer for her in such a matter."

"No. If it is that, you must see her; but I wish you would tell me something more, that I may prepare her."

He considered a moment, then said,

"I will be frank with you, Miss Sackville. I am solicitor for a very heavy judgment-creditor of your father's, and I am come here empowered by my client to put an execution into this house, unless Mrs. Sackville can give him security for the debt."

"How much is it?" I asked, with a failing heart.

"Sixteen hundred pounds."

"Has my father been applied to? You seem to be taking a very extreme course."

"You would not say so, if you knew all the circumstances. I have seen and written to Captain Sackville at least a dozen times, and my client is satisfied that the only way left of getting his money, is by putting in an execution."

"Then what is it you wish my mother to do, supposing that she has the inclination and the power to act? I had better go to her with some definite proposal."

"To give my client a tangible security for the payment of his claim, within a reasonable time."

I went to my mother. She was reading in her dressing-room, having apparently forgotten the arrival of a visitor. At first, when I told her the stranger's business, she seemed paralyzed; and, say what I would, I could induce her to propose nothing; but at last she said:

"I have no power, Florence; or, at least, I can do nothing without seeing your father. I have signed so many documents at different times, that I do not know whether I have any power left."

"But, surely, mother, you knew what you signed? You would not put your name to any deed you did not understand?"

"I did what I thought was for the best, Florence; and I am no lawyer to study technicalities. This man had better see your father."

"But he will not. He says that he has already seen and written to him a dozen times."

"Then I can do nothing. Your father is not here; and I can do nothing without his authority."

"Will you not see this person? He will be better satisfied when he has spoken to you."

"No; I could not bear it."

"He is very civil; and, if he is not satisfied in some way, he will certainly put in this execution."

"Oh, no, no, Florence! that must not be; I could not live to see it."

"But how can it be avoided, mother? If you have no power to give him the necessary security, and can not bring yourself to endure an interview with him, I do not see what can be done."

"You go to him, Florence; you are so cool,

go and try what can be arranged. Tell him to see your father—to see the lawyer—any thing, only do not let there be an execution."

And so I went, to say nothing, offer nothing, do nothing. But, happily for me, the lawyer was a kind man, well to do in the world, and a gentleman; and, having a daughter of my own age, he pitied my perplexity and sorrow.

I ordered luncheon, and while he took refreshment, I sat and thought. Valuable thought that, which leads to no result! At last, I said:

"I really do not know what to do, or propose; unless you will, upon your return to town, see my father."

"That I am sorry to say is out of my power. My positive instructions are, either to obtain security from Mrs. Sackville, or to take the other step I named to you. I have come here unaccompanied by the necessary officers, entirely upon my own responsibility; and, since I can effect no satisfactory arrangement, I grieve to say that I have no alternative but to proceed."

"Not immediately! oh, surely, not now?"

"At once, I fear."

"Oh, no, no! surely something can be done to avert such a disgrace. It will kill my mother. Oh, if my father were but here!"

"I do not think he could facilitate the arrangement of matters, since he has known of the probability of this for weeks; in fact, I saw him a fortnight since, and warped him."

"And what did he say? Did he offer nothing—no terms by which this might be averted?"

"None: except to refer me to Mrs. Sackville."

"But he must have means: I am sure he has."

"I doubt it: his expenses would swallow up very large resources."

"If I could see him," I exclaimed, as a thought struck me, "I should know at once what could be done. How long will you give me, before you put in this terrible execution?"

"Forgive me for seeming hard-hearted; but I can not leave this house, until I have either security for my client's debt, or have placed the property here in the custody of others."

"I felt faint and cold: a shivering came all over me; but I rallied and replied:

"This is indeed quick work! Well, sir, how long, then, will you be my mother's guest? Let me know, that I may go to London and see Captain Sackville."

The man was, and had been doing me a kindness, and I knew and felt it; but for my life, I could not then have spoken more civilly. He looked annoyed at my tone, but answered more courteously than I deserved.

"This is Wednesday; I will stay until Saturday evening. If, then, I do not hear from you satisfactorily, I shall be compelled to follow the instructions I have received."

"I thank you for this concession. I must now see my mother, and learn her wishes; and when I have sent and secured a place in the mail, which passes through Abberly at four o'clock, I will see you again. It would be a mere farce bidding you welcome, and putting every thing at your disposal—for, alas! that they are already; but I really trust that you may be comfortable."

"Thank you: that is quite as much as I can expect. I dare say you think me very hard-

hearted and uncourteous; but if ever you should be unfortunate enough to know more of the dark side of things than you have hitherto seen, you will find that I have done both more and less, than many others would under similar circumstances."

"I do not doubt it," I replied, impatiently; for I was irritated beyond measure at his civility. He seemed so cool, while I was so excited. Had I been older or wiser, I should have been grateful for his forbearance; but pride, anger, and apprehension, were all struggling together in my mind, and united to make me rude and wayward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I FOUND my mother in a most painful state. By turns she was passionately indignant against her husband, and scornfully indifferent; one moment predicting our deaths in the workhouse, the next defying law and its power. At first, she positively refused to allow me to go to London, and chid me severely for proposing such a thing; then, in a minute after, she spoke of it as being the only chance left, of warding off positive starvation.

It was not until very late that she made up her mind what I should do; and then I had barely time to receive some particulars from Mr. Comyn, have a walking-dress packed up, and ride Sancho to Abberly, before the mail passed through. I reached the town only ten minutes in advance of the coach; but that allowed me time to change my riding-habit, and put on a more simple traveling costume.

I had never before journeyed alone to London, and when the bustle was over, I was at first very nervous; but, happily, the anxiety inseparable from my errand, soon overpowered every minor annoyance, and I ceased to fidget about any thing.

It was eight o'clock when we reached the metropolis; the lamps were lighted, and every thing looked so glaring and unlike home, that, when the coach stopped at last, I was thoroughly bewildered.

My father's hotel was in Grosvenor-street; but how far that was from my present locality, I knew no more than if I had just landed from the moon. Fortunately, the coachman had recognized me, and (wondering, I dare say, to see Mr. Vere's grand-daughter in such a forlorn situation), came up and offered his services. It was a relief, and I felt grateful. It needs to feel oneself utterly desolate, before one fully appreciates the worth of kindness.

"Is any body coming to meet you, Miss?" asked the man; "or do you stop here?"

"Oh, no," I answered, quickly; "I am going to my father in Lower Grosvenor-street; but I don't very well know how to set about it."

"You had better have a coach, Miss. Shall I call one for you? Does the captain know as you're coming by me?"

"No, he does not expect me; and, therefore, I shall be very much obliged if you will order some conveyance for me, and tell the man where to go."

"Any luggage, Miss?"

"Only the little bag the groom gave you at Abberly."

"All right, then. Here's a vehicle! Mind the step—that's right: now, then, here's the bag:—never seed a lady with so little luggage afore.—Can I do any thing else? You'll be all safe. Good-night, Miss."

After a long, slow, jolting ride, I got to Grosvenor-street at last. In answer to my inquiry for my father, I was told that he was not at home, nor expected until very late, as he was gone with a party to Richmond.

"Then I will come in and wait," I said. "Be so good as to inform me as soon as he arrives; and, in the mean time, I will write a letter in his room."

The man hesitated; but at that moment my traveling bag with a brass plate upon it, bearing the address, "Miss Sackville, Ingerdyne," was brought in from the hackney-coach, and as soon as it caught his eye he said civilly,

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; but am I to tell Captain Sackville, when he returns, that any member of his family is here?"

"Certainly. I am his daughter."

The man bowed, as if whatever scruples he had entertained were satisfied by this explanation, and led me into a large drawing-room.

After I had written my letters—which were, of course, some hours too late for the post—I threw myself upon the sofa, and, overcome with fatigue and anxiety, fell asleep. A clock struck just as I awoke, and I was startled to find by its single sharp note, that it was so late. I got up and rang the bell, hoping to hear that my father was returned; but was told, in answer to my inquiry, that there was very little probability of his coming home for some time yet.

For two hours longer I paced about that dreary London room; when, just as I had decided upon going to bed, I heard a carriage stop, and looking from the window saw my father alight. In another minute he was in the room; the man who had received me having retired for the night, no one had told my father of my arrival, so that when he entered the apartment, and I advanced to meet him, he started violently, and turned deathly pale.

"Florence!" he exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

As briefly as I could, I told him what had occurred, and then gave him my mother's letter. When he had read it, he threw it carelessly upon the table, and said,

"Just what I expected! And was it to tell me this, and bring that letter, that you have taken this ridiculous journey, when writing would have answered every purpose? Women are all fools!"

And he rose and walked about the room angrily. I remained silent. He continued,

"What the devil will the people here think of your freak, do you suppose? What must they imagine can possibly have happened, to bring a girl like you up to London in the middle of the night, without a servant, and in a public conveyance?"

"I came to relieve my mother's anxiety; and in comparison with that, I should think, it matters very little what any body thinks," I answered, indignantly.

"Relieve her anxiety! What on earth do you suppose this journey will do toward it? Rather increase it a hundredfold, I should think."

"I hope not; for I do not intend that my absence shall be prolonged one unnecessary hour. I feel my position here, father, quite as painfully as you can do; and I hope you will tell me at once what you can do toward relieving my mother from the distressing situation in which she is now placed, and so enable me to return to Ingerdyne to-morrow morning."

"Impossible! Quite impossible! I can do nothing; and your mother knows that perfectly well."

"Nothing! what, then, is to be the result of Mr. Comyn's visit?"

"I don't know; unless you can persuade him to take my bill at an indefinite period—say, ten years. I see no other means of payment."

"There are the horses: surely some of them might be sold. I heard Sir Wallace Mowbray say that Lancelot was well worth four hundred pounds; and you told me that you had refused three hundred for Skyrpocket. If they were sold—"

"Spare yourself the trouble of imagining what might be the result of such a proceeding, since it is impossible. The horses you name were sold yesterday."

And the money—surely, father, you can appropriate some of it to this debt?"

"Not a sou. And for the best of all reasons—it is already appropriated."

"Impossible! when you knew what was hanging over my mother at Ingerdyne? You can not be in earnest."

"I have an idea that you will find me so."

"Then what is to be done?"

"Nothing; as I told you at first. I have no more power to pay that meddling fellow than I have to fly; and, therefore, it is useless worrying me about it. Your mother has brought it on herself, by persisting in keeping a set of idle, extravagant harpies in the shape of servants. The establishment she maintains at Ingerdyne is large enough for a nobleman. Such infernal extravagance must come to an end some day!"

My blood, which had been gradually rising to boiling heat for the last five minutes, now burned fiercely at this unjust charge, and I said, passionately,

"The establishment my mother has kept up in her father's house, was bequeathed to her by him, with ample means for its support. If those have failed, it is not from her recklessness."

"From whose then, young lady?" retorted my father, his eyes glittering with rage; "from whose then?"

"It does not become me to make accusations, although it does to refute them. Upon whose conscience soever our ruin lies, my mother is innocent."

"Indeed! you have been well taught. Is this dutifulness to me a part of your mother's lessons?"

"For shame, father! for shame! You know that that insinuation is false and groundless. You know that never in her whole life did my mother speak slightly of you to her children; and that you should say so, is worse than all the rest."

"How dare you speak in this way to me? Are you not afraid?"

"No. I speak the truth and I have no fear."

"Very brave, very dutiful, and very becoming."

I am sorry it is so late; had it been earlier, I should have been much amused, I dare say, in listening to you for another half hour: but I am very tired, and therefore must close the farce by wishing you good-night;" and, with a contemptuous bow, he rang the bell, and put an end to all conversation by throwing up the window and leaning out, until the waiter entered.

"Order a room to be prepared for Miss Sackville, and when it is ready send the chambermaid to her. Good-night, Florence!" and with these words he left the room.

For some time after, I sat perfectly still: not thinking—for that implies calmness and self-possession, neither of which good things were mine—but drearily, stupidly still. At last the woman came to usher me to my chamber, and I followed her mechanically.

I believe I should that night have walked deliberately through an open window, after any shadow I had fancied beckoned me. I have once or twice experienced something of the same sort since; but only in degree: never to the same extent as I did then. I can only account for the excess of my mental prostration that night, by the fact of my being so young, so tired, and so overpowered with a new sense of responsibility. For this reason my proceedings were very unlike the usual doings of heroines: for, thoroughly exhausted and bewildered, I went to bed and slept soundly.

It was, however, scarcely seven o'clock the next morning when I awoke. The night's rest had dissipated all my apathy, and daylight had restored all my fears and doubts and energies. I sprang instantly from bed, and, while I dressed tried to think.

What was to be done? That was the sole question which presented itself to be answered. Turn my thoughts which way I would, back, like the needle to the north, they reverted to the one all-powerful attraction.

"What is to be done?—what is to be done?" appeared written upon every thing and place: wherever I looked, I seemed to see it. But the answer was nowhere.

That there was no help to be looked for from my father, was very evident; and both he and my mother had said that she had no power. Who then had? Who was the proper person to borrow money upon Ingerdyne itself? It was horrible to think of mortgaging the dear old place; but any thing was better than what Mr. Comyn had threatened. An execution! It seemed as if it would rouse my grandfather from his grave. He, who had been so scrupulous and exact, who paid rather before than after, and would have thought it a crime to incur recklessly a debt he might have difficulty in meeting. How would the bare idea of an execution have wounded and insulted him. Better sell even a portion of the land than let the old house he had loved and dwelt in, in which he had been born and died, be desecrated by the feet of bailiffs.

Thinking thus, I went down to the room I had left the night before; hoping, early as it was, to see my father, and urge him to release Ingerdyne from the presence of Mr. Comyn, by the sacrifice of some portion of the estate. When I entered, I found the breakfast-table laid, and a letter addressed to me in my father's hand, lying upon it. I tore it open and read—

"DEAR FLORENCE—I am obliged to leave town without seeing you again, in order to keep an engagement, made some months since, for the shooting in Scotland. I am sorry that I can not relieve your anxiety respecting your visitor at Ingerdyne, nor give you any directions how to proceed. As I told you last night, both are out of my power. You can, if you like, see my attorney; though I really do not know how he can help you. I inclose his address. You had better return at once to Ingerdyne. I have left James in town, with orders to see you to the mail, and then follow me.

"Yours truly,
"G. SACKVILLE."

As I finished reading this astounding letter, the waiter entered with breakfast. I asked eagerly—

"Is my father gone?"

"Yes, ma'am, he started at five o'clock. It was quite a sudden thing, I fancy; for he was to have had a dinner party to-day."

"Indeed!" said I, almost unconsciously.

"Yes, ma'am; and he's left notes of excuse to be sent to the gentlemen. Hope there's nothing the matter: none of the family ill, or any thing of that sort?"

"Is there not a servant waiting here to see me?" I asked, anxious to get rid of the man's talkativeness.

"No, ma'am; the captain ordered him to come down after you had breakfasted."

"Then, when he does come, let me see him directly."

Left alone at last, I was indeed alarmed and perplexed. That my father should have left London in this extraordinary manner without seeing me again, was both ominous and disturbing: he evidently feared a second interview, and to avoid it had had recourse to this unworthy stratagem.

Besides the increased difficulties of my position, I was mortified and hurt beyond expression. I was less indignant at being thus trifled with, than pained that my father should have stooped so low as to plan and act a deception. What would my mother—what would that prying lawyer say and think, when they heard it?

A terrible fear came over me as I dwelt upon all this. Was some horrible crisis coming, and had he fled to avoid it? Was Ingerdyne already charged with borrowed money, and was the ruin I had long feared, come in this worst shape? True, I had dreaded for months that, ultimately, the dear old place would pass from us; but only in the way of honorable sale, to pay the heavy debts of reckless extravagance: not as payment to one, leaving many losers, and ourselves characterless. No, I had never thought of this.

Ruin! ah, this was ruin indeed; most utter ruin: hopeless, irredeemable. Ruin which nothing could soothe or soften; for it was the wreck both of integrity and reputation. The honor of my grandfather's bright old name was gone forever, now that it was to be written bankrupt; and that which he had left stainless and beloved, was now, in the very birthplace of his race, to become a scorn and a byword—a synonym for heartless extravagance, and reckless selfishness. I was very, very miserable. I felt as if the

beautiful world had suddenly become a desert, and that life was a weary thing to bear. I knew nothing of prayer and its holy balm; so that now, in my day of affliction, I was like a rudderless ship, tempest-tossed and helpless.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER a while, James made his appearance; and, remembering that my mother's carriage was in London, I desired him to bring it, and drive me a few miles on the road, that I might escape all unnecessary imprisonment in the coach.

"Tain't in town, miss," said the man, with an almost imperceptible tinge of displeasure in his voice. "The captain drove it down to Richmond again this morning; for all I told him Mrs. Sackville wouldn't like her pets knocked about so. Them bosses works like jobbers; back'ards and for'ards to Richmond most every day, and round the park, and a-shopping besides. It's too much for 'em by more than half."

"Shopping! my father's shopping *can't* tire them much, James, I should think."

"T'aint the captain, miss, but them as he lets have 'em."

There was a strange look in the man's face as he said this, which assured me that there was some mystery in the background. But it was impossible for me to question my father's servant upon his master's secrets; and therefore, to his evident mortification, I dismissed him, with directions to find out the earliest coach to Abberly, and then to return to me.

While he was present, and my discretion in danger, I repressed my curiosity easily; but when I was alone, with nothing to do but to think, my suspicions became both urgent and painful.

An angry expression once used by a passionate and favorite servant of my father's, after receiving a severe reprimand from his master, and which had been unheeded at the time, now recurred to my mind, suggesting a terrible reason for his constant absence and enormous expenses. The suspicion was maddening, but was no sooner aroused, than a thousand circumstances, hitherto forgotten or unnoticed, rose before my memory to confirm it. For a few minutes I thought deliberately, gathering and combining facts, inuendoes, and careless words; which now, in this fresh light, looked almost like admissions. Altogether, they made a hideous whole; and, almost appalled by it, I sprang from my seat and paced the room hurriedly, as if in action I should lose the sense of suffering.

For a very long time I walked thus restlessly about, thinking of a thousand unconnected things; scarcely one of which remained an instant in my mind, although each one brought in its train a host of others.

My heart was heavy with a sense of our difficulties at Ingerdyne, their apparent hopelessness, and my father's too evident faithlessness; and yet with these pressing subjects, each harassing and painful enough of itself to have engrossed the entire faculties of my mind, I was wandering in fancy over the most absurd and irrelevant matters.

At last, thoroughly tired of walking and dreaming, I resumed my seat, and was speedily

recalled to reason by the sight of my father's open letter, which lay beside me. I took it up and read it again and again. Indifferent as its strain had seemed to me before, yet now, seen through the new light of the writer's perfidy, it appeared heartless and cruel. He was evidently abandoning us to our fate: the fate that his own heartless selfishness had prepared. No help, no support, no sympathy, was to be expected from him! The question, What was to be done? now pressed for instant consideration. I rested my elbows upon a little table before me, and buried my head in my hands, to shut out sight and sound; and tried to think practically.

Upon one thing I soon decided, and that was, to keep my mother, if possible, ignorant of the discovery I had made; and at all hazards, short of a positive falsehood, to preserve Helen from the knowledge too.

This point settled, the next difficulty was, how to release Ingerdyne from the custody into which it had fallen. There was no hope from my father; no concession to be expected from Mr. Comyn; my mother had no power; and, as far as money went, I was helpless. Yet something must be done, and that quickly; or credit, honor, and reputation would be gone forever. But what was it to be? Which way was I to turn for counsel and aid?

It may appear strange, but the idea of consulting with my mother never occurred to me. I knew and felt, as well as if I had been told, that my time for action had come, and that whatever was to be done must be done by me. I was ignorant as an infant of all forms and ways of business; but common sense soon convinced me, that, so long as I knew nothing of Mr. Comyn's powers, I should be working in the dark, and providing against things which might never have the right to happen. But whom to ask? in whom could I confide? There were plenty of whom I could inquire, but who was there that I could rely upon in such an emergency.

If a person wants to assure himself of the number and value of his friends, only let him ask himself this question at his need, and he will learn a useful lesson. As I sat puzzling over it, I leaned forward heavily upon the table, and the pressure made my repeater strike. Oh, my fairy godmother! did your hand touch it? It was a welcome sound to me, for it brought to my memory the image of the giver—Mr. Lyle.

"I will go to him," I said, confidently; "he will help me. I can rely upon him."

In five minutes I had made up my mind, had written a letter to my mother, telling her that unforeseen circumstances had arisen which rendered a visit to Forest Home essential, and in less than half an hour I was safely escorted by James to the Birmingham Railway station.

This was my first expedition upon a railway, and the nervous alarm which I then felt may now appear absurd and irrational; but there is something in the tremendous impetus, the resistless and blind force of powerful machinery, that, to persons unaccustomed to it, is really awful: its mechanical energy and activity, devoid alike of independent volition and sentient qualities, while rendering it controllable, make its power appear terrible to the timid.

This impressed me when I first beheld the huge engine approaching, hissing, throbbing, as

sending forth volumes of smoke and steam. And when the shriek was heard, facetiously called a whistle, but like no sound on this side Styx, and the multitudinous wheels of the cumbrous centipede rattled on the iron road, as we were whirled along at what seemed reckless speed—plunging into dark tunnels, which were filled with a roar of noise and vapor, the carriages oscillating to and fro, and spectral signal posts seeming to start up here and there (whether warning of danger or pointing in safety, one can not tell), I confess it did not need the odor of burnt oil or steam to add to my discomfort and alarm.

I remember, many years after this first excursion, being obliged to sleep at a railway hotel, in a room immediately over the station-yard. Those who have no fear or dislike of railway sights and sounds, can never conceive the horror of that night to me. I could not sleep for the noise and disquiet, and that unearthly, wailing shriek, which seems like nothing so much as the cry of a tortured fiend; but sat watching the monstrous engines come and go, panting, shrieking, and rushing in and out—their blazing eyes glaring through the darkness of the night, and the furnaces glowing like the fiery maw of some demon of the infernal regions.

By a most happy chance, the first person I met upon the platform at Birmingham, was Mr. Lyle. He was returning from Liverpool to Forest House, and was only waiting to see his carriage unstrapped from the truck, that he might go on at once. As soon as he saw me, he came forward with outstretched hands, and grasping mine, exclaimed,

"This is charming! I've been wishing for you and your mother all day, and here you are. What good fairy has befriended me by spiriting you into these parts?"

"The same I suppose who sent you here to meet me, for I was on my way to Forest Home. Bold girl, am I not, to come without an invitation?"

"Very; and I'll punish you by shutting you up there. But who is with you? Where are Helen and your mother?"

"At Ingerdyne. I am alone, and have just come from London."

"From London! and going down to Forest Home alone!" repeated the old gentleman, thoughtfully; losing at once all his gayety, and scrutinizing my looks. "My dear child, what is the matter? You look pale and tired. Come with me into the hotel here, and tell me what has happened. John, look after the carriage, and when it is off, have horses ready to put to, the moment I want them. Come, Flory."

And drawing my arm through his, he led me into the hotel, ordered refreshment, which he insisted upon my taking before I talked, and then dismissing the waiter, drew a chair opposite to me, and prepared to listen.

Without interrupting me with more than a single question, he heard all I had to say; and at the end sighed heavily. Then, after a pause, he said,

"To pay out this man who is in possession, with a view of releasing Ingerdyne, appears to me very much like attempting to stem a torrent by raising an embankment in one place, leaving the rest of the beach right and left without protection. For if you succeeded in getting rid of

this claimant, what assurance have you that half a dozen more may not take his place to-morrow?"

"None."

"Then is it wise—supposing you had the means—to pay him all the money you can raise, without some certainty that by doing so you really free yourselves, and save Ingerdyne?"

"No, I don't think it is. But, nevertheless, I am sure that if I had the power, I should do it at once."

"Would you? What! if the money was your own, independently of your parents?"

"Yes."

"Then you are more generous than prudent, Flory: at least I think so at this moment. Perhaps I shall alter my opinion when I see Ingerdyne again, and be as foolish as you are. However, that will soon be decided, for I will go back with you and see this Mr. Comyn myself; eh, Flory, shall I?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Pray, do! I am so thankful, and so will poor mamma be. You dear, good, kind Mr. Lyle, I am so much obliged to you."

"No doubt, no doubt. I'm quite willing to believe you; on condition that you prove what you say, Miss Flory, by returning to London with me to-night in the mail-train. I have an idea that it will be best to reach Ingerdyne to-morrow as early as we can; which we can do by going to town to-night, and posting to Ingerdyne in the morning."

"I'm ready now."

"No, no. You must have your dinner first, and two or three hours sleep afterward. There is plenty of time, for the train does not leave till midnight; and heroines are good for nothing if they don't eat to keep themselves alive. Ladies who live on air and moonshine, are always in the way, Flory."

The next day we reached Ingerdyne by twelve o'clock, and found Mr. Comyn writing letters in the library, with Helen sitting beside him, amusing herself partly by teasing and bewildering him, and partly in knitting a cat's bed. They told us that my mother was sketching, in the park under the great hawthorn; and thitherward of course we went. As we came in sight of the tree, Mr. Lyle said,

"Your mother is not very much given to asking questions, Flory; therefore, if you are careful to volunteer nothing, you may easily escape telling her any thing that you discovered in London, which will distress her."

"I hope so. I would not be the means of any greater estrangement than exists already."

"No; and depend upon it, Flory, that in this and every similar case, the wisest as well as the kindest thing other people can do, is to hold their tongues. Telling grievances never does any good, but almost always a great deal of harm. If you know any thing ill of a man or his wife, keep it to yourself. Or if you think you *must* tell it, bite your tongue hard for half an hour before you indulge your talking propensities. And now, as soon as you have said the little you have to say, leave your mother and me together, and go and talk to Mr. Comyn; or order luncheon; or do any thing else except breathe a syllable of business."

And so admonished, I gave my mother a very faithful account of all the nothings of my journey; of my father's inability to assist us in diamine-

ing our visitor, and my progress toward Forest Home.

When this was done, and I had answered a few safe inquiries from Mr. Lyle, I gladly obeyed the hint he gave me to withdraw; and, fairly tired out with traveling, planning, and want of rest, went to my own cool, quiet room, where, throwing myself upon the bed, I soon fell asleep.

It was late in the day when I awoke. Twilight was gathering over the earth, and my apartment was in deep shadow. For a few minutes I lay in that dreamy, half awake state, which follows a long and heavy sleep. From this I was first aroused by a bustle below in the shrubbery, and a voice, which I knew to be Mr. Comyn's, saying,

"Good-by! Don't forget to remember me to your sister. I should like to have seen her and said farewell, but as that can't be, I leave my apologies and adieus in your care."

And before, quick as I was, I could reach the window, I heard the carriage steps shut up with a bang, the crack of the postboy's whip, and the forward plunge of the horses, bearing our visitor away. I was vexed; for, now the first shock of the news he had brought was over, I felt that I had behaved abominably, to a man who had been most considerate to us; and I was annoyed that I had lost the opportunity of telling him so.

In this self-reproach time wore on, so that it was not until some time after the sound of the carriage wheels had died away, that I found leisure to wonder how our deliverance from Mr. Comyn's protection had been effected. That his power over us had departed, was certain; for I remembered how strongly he had insisted upon the impossibility of his leaving Ingerdyne until his client's demand was satisfied. But how that had been accomplished was the mystery, which, as soon as I could make myself presentable I hastened to have explained by Mr. Lyle.

I found him sitting alone in the dusky library, gazing absently out of the window. He did not hear me when I entered, so that my first word made him start, exclaiming,

"Eh, Flory! is that you? How you made me jump, you monkey!"

"Did I? That proves what fairy-like steps mine must be, that they can not be heard approaching. But what are you doing here by yourself in the dark?"

"Thinking, Missy, thinking. Not always a very pleasant or profitable occupation."

"And that's true," said I, with a brogue. "But what's yer honor bewilderin' yer brains about now?"

"About every body's business but my own, Paddy; and, as usual in such cases, as I told you before to-day, doing nobody any good, and myself a great deal of harm."

"That's shocking! How would a *confidante* mend matters?" I said, sitting down on a stool beside him. "I'm ready to be confided in."

"Every woman is, I verily believe. You've all as great a hankering after a secret, as your mother Eve. But as you had something to do with my thoughts, I'll gratify you this time by telling you what they were about."

"That's right and wise; I'm quite prepared." And, leaning my head against the arm of his great chair, thus feigning an ease I did not feel, I sat looking up through the dim light at Mr. Lyle, who began abruptly:

"You know Mr. Comyn is gone?"

"Yes, but nothing more; and I'm full of curiosity to know how his departure has been brought about."

"In plain English, you want to know if he has been paid, eh?"

"Exactly."

"No. But I have undertaken that he shall be, if his claim is found to be correct. But of that I have some misgivings. I know the name of his client, and the reputation he used to bear; if it is not altered, he has no right, either in law or justice, to the claim he makes. He has, somehow or other, contrived to keep his lawyer in ignorance; and, not knowing your mother's want of means, relied upon frightening her into payment."

"But my father must know."

"That I shall settle with him, Flory: you and I won't discuss it."

"Then, what were you musing upon? If all this is so well arranged, what were you thinking about so gravely when I came in?"

"About you and yours: the future prospects of the whole family; they are very gloomy, Flory."

I only answered with a sigh; my feigned gayety was gone.

"Never mind, Flory; never mind," rejoined the kind old man, taking the hand which lay upon his knee, and patting it; "keep a brave heart, my child; and remember that the stormiest life is but a short one."

Here, again! no word of religion—no saying, "Bear up, for God is with you!" only a bidding me to remember, as consolation, what ought rather to have made me coward at my thoughtlessness—"that life is short."

I did not think thus then, but answered:

"Ay, so it may be; though life is not always to be measured by years. Its truest gauge is oftenest its suffering. Much sorrow can be crushed into few days."

"That's true; but it is a sad thing to be learned in suffering so early. You are over young yet, Flory, to claim the birthright and inheritance of man."

"Perhaps!" I answered musingly, for I thought of the famishing children I had seen in the London streets only that morning, and remembered that I had been exempt for eighteen years from the misery they had borne from infancy.

There was a short silence; after which Mr. Lyle said:

"You will have to leave Ingerdyne, Flory."

"Shall we? Must it really be?"

"I think so; I see no alternative. Your poor grandfather left your mother's property entirely at her own disposal; and six months after his death, she formally resigned it to her husband. Even if this place were unencumbered, she has not the power to raise a shilling upon it; and I very much fear, Flory, that she is now about to reap the consequence of her imprudence. How she could so forget you and Helen, I can not conceive."

"Poor Helen!" I murmured.

"And poor you, too. What can you do more for yourself than she can?"

"I don't know. But she is so young and sensitive—so unfit to bear sorrow and trial!"

"So pretty and silly, you mean. Never fear for Helen; she'll find friends every where: the

are always simpletons ready to pity and soothe such doll-like faces as hers. You are not half so likely to meet with sympathy as she is."

"I know it," I replied, mournfully; "I have not one friend, where Helen has a dozen."

"Nonsense! You have not one *dangler* to Helen's dozen, you mean. No; and you never will have."

"Why?"

"D'ye want them?" he asked, sharply.

"Yes, I think I do; it's miserable to have nobody to care about one," I answered, in a thick voice, for tears were rising.

"But you have, Flory: you have those who love you well. The few, perhaps; but who would not rather have *one* diamond, than many imitations?"

"I would not; if the diamond were dull, and the counterfeit brilliant."

"Florence!" exclaimed the old man, in amazement.

"It is true. I used to think differently, but now, I would give half my life to be a favorite, such as I see so many other people. How is it that I am less worthy than every body else? Am I more foolish, or selfish, or what?"

"No; but you are prouder, and more exacting. You look deeper, and want more integrity and generosity in your associates, than most people care about. And in proportion as you find men and women false, hollow, or mean, you despise and shun them; instead of being content, and taking things and people as they appear on the surface. While you do this, Flory, and curl your lip so scornfully at what the world does, you never will be popular."

"And would you have me not do it?" I asked, indignantly. "Would you have me profess what I don't feel, and feign friendships for those whose littleness and meanness I despise from my very heart?—those who cringe to the powerful, and oppress the poor; those who promise fairly, and act falsely; those who plot another's ruin, smiling and stabbing all the while? Would you have me conciliate such as these?"

"No. But if you would be popular, you must neither openly condemn, nor even avoid them. Popular people, Flory, have to walk over very dirty ground."

"I never will."

"I know it; and, therefore, you never will be popular."

"Well, then, content."

"Ay, Flory, that's right. All through your life spurn meanness, craft, and time-serving. Dare to be yourself, let what will come; and, instead of craving to be liked by the many, strive only for the love and friendship of the few. You will then be respected and trusted, relied upon, and honored, even by the herd; while, by those whose love is worth having, you will be cherished and prized."

"Ah! you told me long ago that mine would be a lonely life."

"Yes; but so it would be, even in prosperity. You have none of the elements of popularity in you: you are too sensible to be vain of praise; and you are too impulsive, generous, and high-spirited—too reckless of the consequence of exposing evil, and too craving after affection, ever to be a general favorite. But you said just now

you were content."

"Yes."

"That sounds very much like 'No!' But never mind. I have a proposal to make, which will show you that some people love you, even as well as you wish. Now, listen carefully to what I am going to say. I shall speak to you as to a prudent and passionless woman; forgetting that you are an impetuous girl of eighteen."

"Matters here are, I fear, coming rapidly to a crisis. I have utterly failed in rousing your mother to any exertion, or even apprehension; for, now that Mr. Comyn is gone, her fears seem to have vanished, too, and she has become as placid again as ever. I see no chance of doing her any good, except against her inclination, which I am not at all disposed to attempt. In the event of a crash here, I have no idea what she intends to do. For her, therefore, I can effect nothing; but for you it is different: and, as I said, I have a proposal to make on the subject."

"I think you know that I was once so happy as to have a daughter, and, perhaps, you have been told that I lost her, when she was about the age which you were at your first visit to Forest Home. Upon the first day of next month, I shall have lived ten years since that time."

Here Mr. Lyle stopped; his voice was husky; and, though it was dark, I knew that tears were in his eyes. I had often heard of Amy Lyle, and her father's devoted love for her; and I knew by the trembling of his hand, and the catching of his breath in speaking, that the mere mention of her name had awakened all his grief. It was many minutes before he spoke again; and when he did, it was in a mournful tone.

"From that day, Flory, I have lived alone; and, except you, I have never known any one whom I could bear to see and hear in *her* place. You are like her in many ways: you have the same thoughts on many subjects; and, but that your voices are different, I could close my eyes and fancy that she was speaking to me. This is the secret of my love for you, Flory; and this is why I could serve you as I would her. I can do nothing for your mother and Helen; but I can do something for you. Come home with me, and be unto me as a daughter. I am rich and childless; I am lonely and desolate; without one tie to bind me to earth. Do you come, and restore joy to my hearth, and interest to my life; and as *she* was, so shall you be to me, in fortune and love."

I was about to speak, when he stopped me, saying:

"Do not answer yet, Flory; think of it. Do not refuse! do not decide against me! for I am pleading less for you than for myself. And, apart from mere feeling, what better can you do for yourself, my child? You can not avert or avoid the coming storm; you will rather increase its violence, by adding one more to the number of sufferers: and it appears to me that there is less generosity than selfishness in such a course. The little that may be left will be surely less, shared among three, than between two; while, at my death, all which would have been Amy's shall be yours."

"You do not know what poverty is, Flory; nor the misery which its mean and bitter shifts will press upon your spirit. You can not realize what actual want is; the lack of power to

buy the daily needs of life; not its luxuries or comforts, but its bare and pinched necessities.

"You can understand buying a woollen instead of a velvet gown; but you can not understand shivering through a freezing day in a worn-out summer muslin, for want of means to buy a poor, but warmer cotton. You can understand having cold meat and a pudding, instead of many courses and choice wines; and a woman-servant, instead of a butler; but you can not understand meat being a Sunday luxury, and yourself not your own waiter only, but your cook, housemaid, and sempstress. You think of poverty as life in a cottage ornée; elegant, but not profuse. You do not think of it as it is: a fireless grate, a scant bed, a poor meal, coming seldom, and the brain and body tasked to exhaustion to find it.

"All this has never entered your imagination: and yet this is poverty; such as I fear you, with your mother and Helen, will feel it, if you remain together and diminish their means by division.

"I know you will think it selfish and cowardly to seek your own comfort, leaving others sorrowful: but what better can be done? You have no power to help; and there is no generosity in increasing an evil by sharing it. For what I am anxious to do for you, I will do for none other of your name. You are my lost child's image, in soul and person; and when I see you, I have her back again.

"Come then to me, Flory, and I will protect you as I would have done Amy; while all that fortune and parental love can effect toward making life happy, shall be yours."

"Ah! if you would make this offer to Helen," I said, earnestly.

"I will not. Do not urge a request that can never be complied with. I love you, for the sake of her whom you so much resemble; but between Helen and me there is no tie; rather the reverse."

"You think there is no hope of keeping Ingerdyne?"

"I fear, none."

"Then my decision is made. I am very grateful for your generous offer, dear Mr. Lyle: how deeply sensible of your kindness I am, no words can express; and I am more delighted than you will now believe, to find that real and true love for me exists in any heart. But I will never leave Helen and my mother while they are in sorrow, and I can share it, or cheer or help them.

"Do not think I speak from vanity or self-confidence; but I believe that in such poverty as you have painted, I shall be useful to them. I am less likely to sink in the storm than they are; and even were it otherwise, I would still remain. I should hate myself, if I could desert my family because they were poor. If they are to be so, all the greater need for me to cling to them. I will be no summer bird."

"Nonsense! These are the heroics of a romantic girl; not the calm resolves of a wise woman. Think of it, Florence! think of it."

"I have, all the time you have been speaking; and if I know myself, a life's deliberation would bring no different result."

"Then you despise my offer?"

"Oh, no—no! With all my heart I thank and

love you for it. I am honored by it; and I hope you do not think me ungrateful. Were circumstances different, and you then imagined that I could make or add to your happiness at dear old Forest Home, it would be the joy of my life to go.

"If I could choose my place in the world, it would, I think, be such as you have tendered me: but it is impossible now. I am not so blind as not to see what I forfeit, in refusing you. But of that I must not think: I must do my duty, cost what it may to myself.

"Oh, do not turn away, Mr. Lyle! You know how little, except in the place itself, there is to make me happy here: that gone, you know what a prospect lies before me; and you must see that I am not choosing the path which promises most to myself. Remember, you told me long ago that mine would be a life of endurance: here, then, it begins."

"Ay, but the end! where will the end be?"

"Who can tell? Walk which way we will, we can only see the first few steps before us: the end is ever hidden. But even if I saw it, and it realized all my ideas of misery, still I think I should have courage to go on. I could bear any thing better than self-contempt—the shame of feeling myself mean. No: come what will, nothing can be so bad as one's own consciousness of that."

CHAPTER XXX.

As I spoke, Mr. Lyle rose and went to the window. The moon was up, and by her light, I could see the sad and disappointed expression of his countenance. He was evidently hurt and mortified by my refusal; perhaps thought that I was ungrateful. I could not bear this: especially, as regardless of his usual polished courtesy, he made no reply to my repeated entreaties that he would speak to me; so after a while I rose too, and followed him, saying,

"Now, you are angry with me! You think I am ungrateful, and you are angry."

"Oh, dear no!" he answered, somewhat petulantly. "You have a perfect right to please yourself."

"Have I? I wish you would prove it."

"Nonsense!"

"Indeed, it is sense: only convince me that I have a right to forget all ties, when it adds no longer to my comfort to remember them—that poverty breaks the bonds of families, leaving each at liberty to seek his or her own advancement, regardless of others—that a poor parent or sister is less to be regarded than a rich one—and I will yield to my own wishes and inclinations, and go to Forest Home at once; thus sparing myself the pain of seeing suffering I should not share."

There was a silence for some minutes: it was at last broken by Mr. Lyle.

"It is easy to argue plausibly when one's feelings are cool and uninterested. You do not like Forest Home and me, or you would not argue against yourself. Well, I suppose it's natural for young girls to like gaiety and seeing the world better than being in a dull country-house with a superannuated old man."

"Oh! don't say so. It is unjust and cruel!"

and makes my plain duty harsher and harder to perform. I want keeping in the rugged path, not luring or taunting from it. I know I am right, because I would so much rather not do it; and because there is not upon earth a home I would so soon choose as yours. Believe me, my dear, kind friend, I would rather be your child at Forest Home, than be the greatest person upon earth. But it can not and ought not to be: and you feel that I am right, although you will not own it. Put yourself in my mother's place, and me in your lost Amy's, and ask how *you* would feel, if, becoming suddenly poor, I deserted you for a richer and more luxurious home?"

"Amy would never have done it," he answered, with a proud, angry tone.

"No: nor will I."

"Well, well!"

"No, it is not well; for one of us must be very right, and the other very wrong: the question is, which of us is right?"

"You, Flory, you!" said the old man, impetuously; "you are right. I feel it now: you ought to have decided as you have done. Still, I am bitterly disappointed, for I had set my heart upon your coming home with me; and at my age a disappointment is not easily overcome. Nevertheless, you have acted like yourself—generously and nobly. May God bless and help you in the righteous path you have chosen!"

His voice faltered as he uttered the last sentence; while I, thoroughly overcome by his sudden commendation and changed demeanor, with difficulty refrained from tears.

The manner of Mr. Lyle to me, after this evening, was very painful. He seldom spoke, but avoided me in every possible way; sometimes even rudely. He rode and walked out alone, talked almost exclusively to my mother; and, if by any chance we were left in a room together, he invariably made an excuse to leave it. I had always been accustomed, both at Forest Home and Ingerdyne, to read aloud to him after breakfast; but now he rose the instant the cloth was removed, and either went to his own room or drove to Abberly, upon the plea of urgent business.

All this, which was as evident as it was painful, mortified me cruelly. I knew that the decision to which I had come was right; and yet I was punished as if I were guilty. I felt miserable, angry, and indignant. It seemed as if those early days had come back, when I used so often to be suspected of thoughts and deeds which I never either felt or did, that my spirit, roused to rebellious recklessness, disdained at last to vindicate itself.

I could have borne this patiently enough from people for whom I did not care, or for whose love and esteem I was indifferent; but with Mr. Lyle it was otherwise. At first I was wretched, seeking opportunities for an explanation, and doing every thing I could to recover the affection which I seemed so strangely to have lost. But at last, as of old, grief changed to contemptuous disregard of the opinions of one who was either *too prejudiced*, or *too weak to judge me truly*; and in this frame of mind, frowns and smiles, cold bows and loving greetings, became alike indifferent to me.

This state of things lasted until the evening

before Mr. Lyle's departure; when it ended thus: I had been to the village to see a poor old woman, one of my late grandfather's pensioners. She was very ill, and having sent in vain for the clergyman (to whom, I afterward found, her message had not been delivered), she entreated me to remain and read the Bible to her. I willingly consented, not only because I was pleased to serve her, but because I was glad to get away so long from home. So, having sent her little grandson to Ingerdyne with a note to my mother explaining where and how I was engaged, I took my place by old Mary's bed.

The scene reminded me forcibly of that similar one I had so recently witnessed at Mowbray; and as I sat by the window during the patient's short and restless sleep, and closed my eyes, it required no great exercise of imagination to fancy that the faces I had so lately watched, were near me again.

The moon, now at her full, beamed brightly through the casement, casting the shadows of the diamond-shaped panes upon the bed and floor: every corner of the little room was lighted by the pure silver radiance, while all unsightly details were either concealed or appeared even picturesque. The very atmosphere seemed holy and calm:—a fit hour for angels to visit earth and commune with mortals. The moonlight was so clear and bright, that, when the sufferer awoke, I was able to read to her without the aid of a candle; and I continued to do so, until her daughter, bringing the night's draught, warned me that it was getting late.

"Bless you, miss!" exclaimed the old woman, when I stood beside her bed to take leave; "bless you for reading those sweet words to me. It is not often the likes of you comes into such a poor place as this: but you come of a good family, what never forgets the sick. Your grandmother did it afore you; and you may be proud, young lady, to take after her. Mayhap I shall never see you again, for my time is short; and if so, take an old woman's blessing for all your kindness—not forgetting the greatest of all, this night's reading."

"It's a great gift you have, miss, to read so gentle like, and sweet; the words go to the heart so. I pray you may never use this great blessing to harm yourself or another; for your voice sounds to my ears like a spirit's, and it might lead many to good. You'll excuse my freedom, I hope, miss, for it's meant well; and think of my words when I am gone. I take leave to say them, remembering what you have read to-night, to 'do all to the glory of God.'"

In the cottage kitchen I found Mr. Lyle's old servant waiting to escort me home; and, upon inquiring how he had found me out, I learned that his master had sent him.

With my heart softened by thoughts of the scene I had just left, and with the holy words I had been reading fresh in my memory, I walked slowly and silently home. When I reached it I found Helen reading a novel in the drawing-room; Mr. Lyle and my mother had retired to their own rooms. Supper was upon the table; it had been left for me: but I was in no mood for eating, and so, with a brief good-night to Helen, which she was too busy to notice, I went up to bed. As I closed my door, the turret clock rang out eleven sharp clanging notes.

The first thing I did was to put my candle into a corner; the next, to draw back the heavy blue curtains, throw up the window, and let in the moonlight. Not a cloud flecked the deep blue vault above, where, high and bright, as if self-poised in the heavens, shone the queenly orb in the centre of her stary court: while far and wide as the eye could range, and deeper, and deeper, as long as it could penetrate the infinite space, it rested upon glittering myriads. I pondered upon the solemn beauty of the night, as I had done many a time before, until I fancied that every star was an angel's eye, keeping special watch over some mortal's fate.

Thus, dreaming and gazing, I sat by the open window, until the clock again struck. All was so still that the sound seemed to startle the birds on their roost; for I fancied that I heard them murmur and chirp among the branches. Thus roused to a recollection of the time, I slowly turned from the fair prospect, and drew the curtains with a resolute hand, to put temptation out of my sight.

Having replaced the candle upon the dressing table, my eye fell upon a letter, which lay before me, half hidden by the pincushion, and addressed in Mr. Lyle's handwriting. I eagerly snatched it up, tore it open, and sat down to devour its contents. They were as follows:

"MY DEAR CHILD FLORENCE.—Now that within a very few hours I am about to take a leave of you for years, if not for life, I find it impossible to maintain the painful distance which my own act has placed between us. I have, during the last fortnight acted with the selfish object of insuring, as I imagined, my own comfort and peace, regardless of your duty and happiness: and, as I deserved, have signally failed.

"You are quite right, Flory, in asserting that those who disregard the rights and claims of others, never succeed thereby in securing their own ease. The eternal law, 'Do unto all men as ye would they should do unto you,' is ever in force; and its infraction is surely, if not immediately, punished. I have found this out. I have gone on, heedless of the pain I was inflicting upon you by my manner and words—of the injustice of making you suffer more, that I might suffer less—and, instead of succeeding, I have increased my own discomfort tenfold. I have avoided your society, trying to reconcile myself to the necessity of doing without it; seeing that for months I had dwelt upon the hope of your walking with me during the remainder of my earthly pilgrimage. I have refused myself the solace of listening to the only voice which restores the past, lest it should become too dear to me; and in all this I have sought my own happiness, forgetting yours.

"I am fitly punished; for we are now parting, perhaps forever, and by my own selfish shortsightedness I have deprived myself of memories upon which I might have lived.

"It is too late to repine; and, I fear, too late to repair this: all that I can do, therefore, is to make this confession, and ask you, for its sake, to forgive the unkindness of an old man, whose love for one he looks upon as the representative of his lost child, has led him into unintentional cruelty.

"And now, farewell. By what I have felt

during the last few days, I can judge what I shall suffer when I have left Ingerdine forever. It will be like a second parting with the dead—an opening of wounds, scarred, but not healed, by ten years' endurance. Yet, I freely acknowledge that you are right. You have chosen the strait and narrow path; and although I suffer by it, I admire you the more for your integrity. So perverse is human nature, that if you had decided otherwise, I might have been better pleased, but I should have loved and honored you less.

"Ever through life, my child, do as you have done in this case: act as fearlessly, as unselfishly, and as generously; and in your own heart you will be amply rewarded, even if others refuse to do your motives justice.

"And now one word more.—Should circumstances change, and a father's roof be needful to your comfort or happiness, come to me. While I live, Forest Home will have open doors for you; and when I die, you will find that you were not forgotten.

"Do not allude to this letter in the morning; only let me see you wear this ring, and I shall know that all is peace between us.

"Once more, farewell! The blessing of the childless old man be with you through life!

"Write to me soon, and ever believe me,

"Your affectionate and faithful friend,
"HORACE LYLE."

My first impulse upon reading this letter, was to go to the writer, and upon my knees confess all my sins of thought against him; and with the tears which now dimmed my eyes beseech his pardon.

All that I had called unjust and cruel during the past fortnight was forgotten. He was blameless, and I had been captious, unreasonable, and ridiculous. What had he done, and what had I not done, in my conceited self-estimation, to make and widen the breach for which he had unjustly blamed himself? All that I had so ungratefully forgotten in my absurd assertion of dignity, was now remembered: and the memory of his generosity, courtesy, patience, and affection touched me more deeply than ever. I hated myself; and gladly would I have humbled myself to the dust before him, could I have blotted out from my conscience the recollection of the last few arrogant days.

Sitting down to think and reason like a rational being, was out of the question; and, with the letter in my hand, I walked up and down the room until the second sharp stroke of early morning rang out in the silence.

The next day I was down stairs very early, hoping to see Mr. Lyle alone; but I was disappointed: he did not join the breakfast party until he had been twice summoned, and then he came with a packet of unopened letters, as if by reading them he could escape conversation.

He spoke very little during the meal, and when it was over, made a hurried apology to my mother for retiring to his room, for the purpose, as he said, of inspecting the packing of his traveling trunk; and, without a syllable to Helen or me, he left the table abruptly.

"Mr. Lyle's very odd to-day, I think," said Helen. "He seems quite tired of you, Flory, or else you quarreled coming down. Pray, do

he offer his juvenile self to your acceptance, and have you affronted the dear child by refusing, saying—'You're o'er young to marry yet?'"

"For shame, Helen!" I said, angrily, as she sang the last words in her mimicking voice. "How dare you speak so impertinently?—You seem to forget all that we owe to Mr. Lyle."

"No, I don't. Though why I'm to be grateful for his scaring away a pleasant, talkative, good-natured individual like Mr. Comyn, and putting himself and his traveling trunks in his place, I confess, I don't see at present: but live and learn, Floribel, eh?"

And making a grimace, exaggerating with admirable fidelity a particularly grave look of Mr. Lyle, Helen ran out of the room: while I remained, to recall, over and over again, the glance of gratified and paternal affection with which, when he first entered the room, he had greeted the sight of the brilliant ring upon my finger.

Notwithstanding that he was going, I felt contented and happy; for there is something in reconciliation, as in confession, which not only eases the heart, but quiets it too. /And my spirit was at rest: filled with the deep, tranquil satisfaction of being at perfect peace with one to whom I felt all a daughter's love.

It was autumn now; that loveliest time of all the year when it is bright and sunny, and the dearest and saddest of any when it is gusty and wet.

This was a glorious day. The walks were covered with sere leaves blown off during the night, and the little breeze which still remained made them dance up and down, or chase each other under the edges of the grass plat and shrubby borders where they had hidden. The sun was bright as in summer, but not oppressive; the sky clear and blue as if it were one vast sapphire dome, and the air brisk and light. On every tree and shrub, from branch to branch hung festoons of gossamer, gemmed with millions of dew-drops; while over the open space continually floated long slender lines of the fragile and beautiful webs, which covered the grass like a veil. The remaining leaves were yellow, and many of the trees were nearly bare; while from the Siberian crabs and plum trees, which here and there peeped out from the more elegant shrubs, their summer covering was entirely stripped; and the golden and ruby fruit alone enriched the branches. Every now and then the sharp cracks of a double-barreled gun came from the stubble and turnip lands round; and as the dogs heard it, in their lazy lounge upon the great hall-mats, they looked up and pricked their ears intelligently.

Surrounded by all these sights and sounds, I stood gazing idly and dreamily at a gorgeous dahlia—they had only just come in then—when Mr. Lyle's carriage turned out from the courtyard, and drew up to the hall-door.

A minute after, I heard Helen's voice calling me; another, and I was standing before our visitor with my hands locked in his, and with no power to reply to or acknowledge the blessing, which in broken tones he solemnly invoked upon me from Heaven.

A few more seconds, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Six weeks after this, Ingerdyne passed from our hands forever. The mortgagee took possession, and the home of our ancestors was ours no longer.

The first terrible shock over, I was startled to find how helpless and paralyzed my mother continued. She was like an infant; as irrational and as dependent. She could do nothing but imagine improbabilities, and weep or be angry at their non-fulfillment. Helen, too, was ever in extremes of grief or indifference: one hour crying as if her heart was broken; the next, fancying some bewitching bonnet or mantle. Thus associated, difficulties were hard indeed to bear and surmount; and before many days had passed, I thought that martyrdom would be bliss compared to a life so spent.

As soon as it was known how matters stood, several creditors whose judgments, already obtained, had hung threateningly over my father's head for months, now put them into force; and in a few days no less than four executions were in the house. What a wretched, desecrated place was Ingerdyne then! No corner was sacred from intrusion: no room so private that we could call it our own, or resent the continued "looking in" of some one or other of the officials who overran the place.

No wonder that my mother was indignant, and half broken-hearted; but she was unfortunately so unacquainted with business and its marble forms, that she could neither be silent nor civil to the herd of low, vulgar men, about her: she treated them with undisguised scorn and contempt; consequently, in less than a week, they had learned to dislike her so much, that, instead of trying to render their presence less painful to her, they made common cause, and annoyed her in every possible way.

Sick at heart, upbraided by my mother for not doing as she did, and perpetually appealed to by the officials, I led a most miserable life. At last, to my unspeakable relief, my mother determined to go to London and seek my father; and, *in propria persona*, see what could be done.—Helen was to go too; and having prevailed upon our surgeon's wife—an old lady of sixty, who had never been admitted within our doors before—to remain with me during her absence, my mother left Ingerdyne.

It was a bitter November morning. A fog, so dense as to be almost palpable to the touch, hung over the face of the earth, and the horses' breath steamed against the yellow vapor like a cloud. The trees dripped with moisture, and the frost-bitten shrubs hung their perished heads, as if in utter weariness of life. Every thing looked dreary, forlorn and wretched: the moat was covered with dead leaves, the walks were heaped up in all corners with the same evidences of decay, for the dead flowers had not been removed, and even the hardy Michaelmas daisies drooped. To this universal desolation there was but one exception—a monthly rose, upon whose hardy stem one half-blown flower still lingered—the solitary smile in this sad wilderness.

Strangely to me sounded Helen's gay laugh and congratulatory exclamation, as she followed my mother into the post-chaise. She seemed to

feel neither sorrow nor misgiving : the visit to London was the all-in-all of the moment, and beyond it she neither looked nor thought.

Not so my mother : she wept bitterly ; seeming to feel instinctively that she was gazing her last upon the home of her childhood. She never spoke, but signed to me to gather the rose I have mentioned ; and then with a slow inclination of the head to the watchful postboy, bade him by that gesture drive on.

Every day, now, Ingerdyne was besieged by creditors ; from whose bitter complaints it appeared that nothing had been paid to them for years, but that, time after time, they had been put off with specious promises, not one of which had ever been fulfilled. Inquiries were hourly made for my father's address ; a request with which I had no more power to comply than the veriest stranger : for my mother and Helen had as yet seen nothing of him, and were staying with an old friend of the family in London.

Meanwhile affairs were progressing rapidly to a close. No offer having been made to pay the execution creditors, a day was fixed and advertised for the sale of the furniture, plate, &c., at Ingerdyne.

The paper containing the advertisement was laid upon my table by an unknown hand ; no one even among those rough men being hard-hearted enough to present it to me.

For a moment I was stunned. A blow, even when it is expected, always seems to fall suddenly ; and such a one as this was heavy enough to excuse more than usual cowardice.

Happily for human nature, however, this state seldom lasts long : we awaken from the crushing sense of calamity, to prepare for the action which must follow, and in the exertion find relief.

I had never been much of a dreamer, except in seasons of peace or intervals of ease ; and now the magnitude of the event effectually precluded repose. As soon, therefore, as the first shock was over, I wrote to my mother ; to the attorney whose address my father had given me, when I was in town ; and to Mr. Lyle, whose last letter was dated from Naples.

From the first, I speedily received a letter full of hopeless sorrow. She had not seen my father, but she had received an undated note from him, bearing an Irish post-mark, saying that, as he found things had come to the worst at Ingerdyne, he thought the creditors would be more tractable if he were out of the way, and would more easily come into any arrangement that could be offered. What arrangement he contemplated, however, he did not say ; and his wife, left completely in the dark, was desponding and miserable.

From the attorney, too, I soon heard ; but in an equally unsatisfactory strain : he wrote courteously, although in a tone of displeasure ; saying that he had so often been made instrumental in proposing arrangements which his principal had never carried out, that he must decline interfering any further in affairs which promised so ill.

Hope of aid from both these sources was now cut off, and I felt that to be longer without the advice and assistance of some professional man *was impossible*. Still I knew no one to whom I *could apply, and was beginning to think of writ-*

ing again to London, when it flashed across my memory that Mr. Spencer, my grandfather's solicitor, had a son practicing at Abberly. To him therefore I went, and finding him at home, entered a lawyer's office for the first time in my life.

He was writing when I was ushered in, and not hearing any name announced, continued to bend over his desk ; not even raising his eyes. But when, rather tired of waiting, I spoke at last, he started up hastily, and I recognized the face of a gentleman I knew well as a visitor at Comberton.

"Mr. Ashurst !" I exclaimed, as he came forward.

"The same," he answered gayly, offering me his hand ; "and very much at your service."

"Thank you ; but I came to see Mr. Spencer, the solicitor."

"Then I am still more at your command, for I am Mr. Spencer, the solicitor."

"His partner?"

"No, his veritable self."

"That's impossible."

"In plain English you mean it's a fabrication. But it is no such thing. I am Frank Spencer, attorney and solicitor of High Abberly."

"I thought your name was Ashurst. For some reason or other, you've been sailing under false colors. Excuse me, but who are you, really?"

"I'll tell you presently, when you have done me the honor to be seated. Clients always sit, you know ; it's more dignified. There now, I'll retreat behind my desk and open this great book, by way of impressing you, and any other confiding victim who may come in, with my studious habits, and proceed to enlighten you. Though first, I must let my mother know. You will take some luncheon with her, after business."

"No, thank you, I—"

"Every body says 'no thank you,' and means 'yes, certainly.' That's as well understood in enlightened society as the correctness of a railway directors' half-yearly account, or the sincerity of a lawyer's grief at being instructed by his richest client to file a bill in Chancery against a joint-stock bank. But the practice is rather commonplace, I think : I am surprised you patronize it."

"Why ? I was never famous for originality, you know. But really you must excuse my accepting your invitation to-day, for my business is urgent—and extremely painful."

"I grieve to hear it," he said, becoming grave at once, and drawing a chair opposite to me. "Can I serve you ? If I can, command me.—I'm not always such a rattle-pate as you might fancy."

"Oh, I know that very well. I've seen you often at Aston thoughtful enough for a judge. Mr. — what is your name ?"

"Spencer. I took it to oblige my uncle, and to succeed to his fortune. My father, General Ashurst, who was killed during the Peninsular war, married your old friend Mr. Spencer's sister ; and when she died I was left to his care. I believe I was a sad pickle in those days, worrying my good uncle and aunt to death ; but happily he managed to reform me tolerably, and I am free to own, that whatever little good there

is in me is of my uncle's making, whatever bad is my own undisputed property."

"I thought a moment since that you spoke of my lurching with your mother, and now you say she is dead: you are really very mysterious!"

"I call Mrs. Spencer—my uncle's good old wife, who brought me up—mother: and a better one no man ever had. But to return to our muttons—what is the matter? What can I do to serve you?"

"Listen patiently to what I am going to tell you, and then direct me, if you can."

My request was implicitly obeyed. During the whole of my long rambling story Mr. Spencer never interrupted me by a single word, but let me tell my tale in my own way—a golden rule when a man wants to get at the truth of a thing—and after displaying as much interest as any mortal not immediately concerned in the matter could do, said, when I had concluded,

"And all this time have you had no adviser? no lawyer, I mean?"

"No."

"Then it is quite time you had; things have gone on in their own way too long already. Can not you procure your father's address by writing to his agents? He ought to be down himself: he is the proper person to act. It's a vile, cowardly thing, leaving you here alone to bear all this: it's infamous—I never heard of such a proceeding."

"Perhaps not; but as the world progresses, strange things do and will happen. The question now is, what can be done? Or rather, what can *you* do to help me? for my idea is, that in depending upon my father we rely upon a broken reed, and that whatever is to be done, must be done without him."

"And your mother—where is she? Surely she is to be found: they can not both have left you to do their work."

"My mother is in London. You must have paid very little heed to what I have been telling you, if you have not discovered how incapable she is of contending with such a rude storm as this. She is far too gentle for such rough work."

"And what are you? Are you so well accustomed to bailiffs and sheriffs' officers, that their presence has become indifferent to you?"

"No, of course not; but I am younger, and—"

"And therefore all the less fit for it. What on earth can people in their senses expect you to do in such dilemmas as these? They run away themselves, frightened to death, and leave you, as if you had no feeling, to fight with difficulties out of which even I, a lawyer, can see no way."

"Oh, do not say so! Don't say that nothing can be done, or I shall lose all courage. I have so hoped that, even at the last hour, means might be found of saving Ingerdyne from this terrible disgrace, that I believe I could bear up no longer if that stay were struck down."

"But what can be hoped for? What chance is there of affairs taking a favorable turn? As far as I can judge from your statement, these men are in legal possession; and having once obtained it and advertised a sale, it will require *something tantamount to a miracle to rescue the property from them.*"

"Indeed! Have they a right to sell every thing in this way?"

"Unfortunately, yes. But I will go back with you to Ingerdyne, if it will be any satisfaction to you, and see that no unfair advantage has been taken. Shall I do so? Would you like it?"

"Yes, but—"

"But what? If you wish it, there is no 'but' in the matter. In fact, you have no right to a will at all: having consulted me, you are bound to follow my advice. So come up to my mother, and, while you have some luncheon, I will finish my letters for the post, and order my horses."

As soon as we reached Ingerdyne, Mr. Spencer summoned into the library each one of the officers in possession, and when the long interviews with them were over, returned to tell me that every thing had been done in due form, and that nothing but the power to pay their claims could release me from them.

Every day now until the sale, and nearly all the day, Mr. Spencer passed at Ingerdyne. Every trouble and annoyance from which he could protect me, he continued to ward off; and when my heart and hopefulness sank under the weight of present grief, and future care, he cheered and encouraged me, until the dark cloud passed.

He also arranged that, after the sale was over, I should be his mother's guest, until something could be ascertained of my father's means and intentions; and the kind old lady, whom until lately I had never seen, urged my acceptance of her hospitality with the most generous warmth.

Well, the last day came. During the whole of it I never stirred from the dark little sitting-room, which when a child I used to run by at night, fancying that "Bogie" stood in the doorway. But when evening fell, my gloomy reverie was broken by one of the auctioneer's men, who came in to paste the lot tickets upon the furniture.

"I won't be long, Miss," he said civilly, as I rose from my chair, and turned to leave the room. But I could not remain: I felt that my courage was giving way, and I did not choose that he should see it.

The evening was dull and wet. The rooms were all deserted, for the men had gathered together in the servants' hall, and were carousing.

With a desperate resolution I compelled myself to go through every chamber. The first was the library. I had seen it two days before, but now I hardly knew it: the carpet had been taken up, the books were out of their cases, tied together and lotted; the tables, reading-desks, globes, and sofas were all ranged against the walls; the curtains were rolled up high, the book-case doors thrown wide open, and every article was ticketed.

Oh, how desolate it looked! how unlike itself! I stood at the door and gazed miserably round. There were the great arm-chairs, worked by an industrious ancestress; every gigantic rose and monstrous tulip upon which I had known from babyhood. I almost recognized the very one upon which I had fallen asleep the evening of my last return from Ireland, when my grandfather had roused me from my frightful dream. I almost fancied that I saw and heard him now; and, sick at heart, I passed quickly through the room, and went down the little oak stairs into the dining-room.

All was the same there. Upon the dark, bright tables and sideboards, stared the little white tickets of the auctioneer; and in the drawing-room I found a group of people from the town (friends, probably, of some of the officers) examining the furniture, and making observations upon its quality and condition. As I entered the room, they looked up, but took no further notice. I was a cipher to them, their interest being absorbed in the couches and ornaments.

With that unaccountable impulse which often leads one to gaze upon painful objects, I remained in a recess, listening to their conversation as they walked about the room and commented upon its fittings. I felt a morbid pleasure in hearing all they had to say, and learning how we were looked upon in the world outside our gates. After a time, however, they went away; and I wandered about, until I found myself in the nursery. It was half dismantled; most of the furniture having been carried into other rooms. Yet there was the bed I had slept in during so many years, with its gaudy chintz hangings; and in which I had so often listened tremblingly in the dreary winter nights to the owls, and hidden my head beneath the pillows in terror at their hooting cry. There were the pasteboard screens upon the chimney-piece, which Helen and I had made, and adorned with figures cut out of old fashion-books. There were the little chairs in which we had sat, and round the backs of some were fragments of the ribbon reins which we had tied on, calling them horses. Helen's hoop was still in its old corner, and a heap of long-forgotten playthings lay upon the floor. I stooped to take up one, but a man, who had followed me unnoticed, exclaimed,

"Them are all marked: every thing in this here room is put down."

I was frightened—absolutely terrified—at the crime of taking up one of my own broken toys, and dropping it hurriedly went forward through the passage door, and into my mother's room. Here, for the first time, I spoke. My voice sounded harsh and strange in the half empty space; and I scarcely recognized it. Faces seemed to peep at me from the open wardrobes, and from behind the bed-curtains; and completely overcome, I sank down upon a stray chair, and burst into tears.

In a moment after, I became aware of the presence of some other person in the room, and then a voice close to me said gently,

"I was afraid of this. You promised not to come here."

I did not reply, for the sympathy of the tone completely destroyed the little fortitude that was left, and I wept without restraint. I had felt so forlorn, that the sudden change unnerved me.

"Oh, Florence! Florence! this is dreadful," said Mr. Spencer, calling me by my Christian name for the first time in his life. "I can not bear to see you suffer thus: you will kill yourself. If you have any pity, spare me this misery. Now at the very last, when you have borne up so bravely all along, do not give way thus. Remember how we all depend upon you."

"I can not help it! Only go away and leave me; I shall be better soon."

"No, you will not: you have been too much

alone already. You are worn and harassed to death; and you want sympathy and society, not solitude. You must go home with me: my mother expects you; for she absolutely forbade my returning alone, and I have brought her little carriage to drive you back."

"No, no, it is impossible. I can not leave here while a single thing remains. I could not bear to desert the old place now."

"Forgive me, Florence, but this is romance: very unlike your usual strong sense. What good can you do here? What wrong can you prevent? None. You will only expose yourself to needless pain, and perhaps insult. Among the many people who will be here to-morrow, there will not be half a dozen who will appreciate your motive for remaining; while most of them, thinking it arises from either a mercenary or defiant spirit, will treat you accordingly. Forgive me for speaking thus, but you are brave enough to hear the truth; and I—like you too well, not to prefer displeasing you for a moment, to concealing it from you."

"But no one will suffer except myself, even if I am misunderstood; and I should so like to stay till the very last," I said, beseechingly.

"And so you should, if, either for yourself or Ingerdyne, your stay could do any good. But it will not. You are already excited beyond your own control, and as ill as you well can be; while Ingerdyne is past all help from either of us."

Still I lingered; and then he said, taking my hand to lead me away, "Come, Florence! make an effort; and, as children say, it will soon be over. Come."

"I can not go without seeing the house once more."

"Very well, then, we will go round together. So come, take my arm, and you shall have your whim."

And so, silently and passively, I went again through the whole house. Not a room, not a closet, not a window that was not individually dear to me—not one to which some childish association did not cling. And yet I neither spoke nor wept as we passed them by; until, as we were leaving the library, I turned to look at it for the last time. Then came thronging back a host of sights and memories—visions of the dead and absent—sounds of many voices—gleaming lights in their places of old—and mournful, unearthly noises—all the fancies of my own brain and eye, yet not the less bewildering; and, uttering a low cry, I fainted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

In a fortnight the sale was over; and when the accounts and claims of the execution creditors were sent in to Mr. Spencer, they were found to be so immense, that their expenses and demands left nothing to be divided among the rest of the claimants; and, of course, nothing remained for ourselves: Ingerdyne was gone, and we were absolutely homeless, and all but penniless.

My father was still in Ireland, but in what part we knew not; my mother and Helen were staying with the friend to whose house they had first gone, and I was at Abberly. The

scattered, we felt forlorn and helpless. The worst had come at last, and was to be met; but how?

I knew very well that little, if not absolutely nothing, was to be expected from either my father or mother. The unhappy connections formed by the first, would effectually prevent the revival of that care for his family, which had so long been dying away; and the last was so utterly powerless and depressed, that it was idle to expect energy from her. Upon Helen and me then rested every thing, and (Heaven help us!) what could we do?

Yet that something must be done, and that quickly, was evident; for when the little pittance which each of us possessed was gone, there remained no source, save in our own exertions, from which we could replenish our store.

True, Mrs. Spencer had urged me, with all the delicacy and tenderness of a sincere friend, to remain with her; assuring me that my society had become too dear for her to relinquish. But much as I honored and esteemed her, and welcome as was the peace of her quiet and well-appointed household after the stormy scenes of the past summer, yet I felt that duty imperatively negated her proposal, and summoned me to my mother.

Under this conviction I wrote to London, promising to join my mother the instant she chose to call for me; but many days elapsed without bringing a reply, and when at last it did come, it was couched in such upbraiding terms as stung me cruelly. My mother charged me with selfishness in deserting her, now that her power of indulging me in the luxuries to which I had been accustomed was gone, and bade me cease to trouble myself about her, since her dutiful child Helen remained to comfort and support her.

My first impulse upon reading this letter was indignation, the next sorrow. How unjust these accusations were, my own conscience told me: why had I rejected Mr. Lyle's offer, and Mrs. Spencer's, if I so lightly regarded the claims of my family? Why had I endured alone the tortures of the last month, if I was so careless of their feelings? My mother's injustice embittered my lot, and saddened my heart. Oh, what wretchedness did not this captious spirit augur for us all! Who could tell where it would stop, or who else might be the sufferer? It might deprive us, perhaps, of some of the few friends who yet were left. What a life of miserable endurance lay outstretched before us all! On one side dissatisfaction and suspicion; on the other, depression and resentment. The prospect was indeed gloomy, and I felt dispirited and unhappy.

For some time after breakfast I sat holding the letter in my hand, my heart full of mingled anger and sorrow. I had just resolved upon going instantly to town, when Mr. Spencer entered the room, and leaning upon the chimney-piece, by which I sat, asked me,

"What news from home? Is Captain Sackville *non est* still?"

I gave him the letter. When he had read it, he drew a chair beside me, saying,

"Exactly what might be expected; but not the less unjust and untrue. Surely, after this epistle, you will not persist in your determination to go to London. Your mother is perfectly

satisfied with the daughter she has; therefore, there is no earthly necessity for you to trouble her: indeed, it seems to me that she rather wishes to decline your visit."

"So she may now; but I know Helen better than she does. Helen has no greater power of enduring hardship and poverty than —; in short, she is too sensitive and delicate to bear trouble; and I shall be wanted soon, if not now."

"Yes; but I see no sort of reason why you are to throw yourself away, and wear out your life in the service of relatives, who at best will only not reproach you. Florence, you are better worth—"

"It's a pity, then, I can not persuade people to think so," I rejoined, testily.

As I spoke, my companion rose suddenly from his chair, went to the window, looked out for a few seconds, then returned hastily, and sat down again.

I was too busy with my own thoughts to heed his restless movements, until he said, in a low voice, his head bent forward the while as if to watch the gyration of the feather-brush which he twirled energetically between the palms of the hands that hung across his knees:

"Florence, have you never thought that the willingness to serve your family, for which you have so often condescended to thank me, springs from some other source than regard for them?"

"No! what other source can it have?"

"Can not you guess?"

"I am afraid not. I am not very happy this morning, and my brain is not particularly inventive."

"Do you really believe that it was for the sake of Captain and Mrs. Sackville, and to help them, that I have done what little I have, in their affairs lately?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then you are wrong. It was for *you*, wholly and entirely. I did not intend to have told you so yet, often as it has trembled on my lips; lest it might seem ungenerous to press a selfish suit in your day of sorrow. But that letter leaves me no choice: I must speak and know my fate at once. You seem astonished, Florence: surely, you have suspected my secret; surely, you must have felt that love for you alone has urged and guided all my actions."

As he spoke a new light broke upon me, making my brain reel and my whole frame tremble. How plain and instinct with meaning were many things now, that hitherto had seemed matters of course, and how miserably blind I had been! Until this very moment, the idea of what had come to pass had never entered my imagination; and yet how clearly I saw now, that I might and ought to have seen it from the first. Absorbed in my own thoughts and sorrow, how culpably short-sighted I had been!

Something of the shame and mortification I felt must have been written in my face, for he continued:

"Can it be possible that you are surprised, Florence? that you were not prepared for this? My attentions—"

"Ought to have been understood, I acknowledge it with shame; but, indeed, they were not. I never suspected that your kindness to me arose from any other feeling than compassion for my forlorn and helpless state; and the idea that you

regarded me in any light beyond that of a mere acquaintance, never once occurred to me."

"But now that you do know it, Florence: that I tell you the happiness of my whole life is in your hands—that existence will be to me a blank, unless you share it—now you will give me hope of different thoughts, will you not? Seeing how inexpressibly dear you are to me, you will allow a longer acquaintance to win for me that place in your affections which I would gladly give half my life to obtain; and without which life will be valueless."

"Oh, do not say so!" I replied, mournfully; "you have known me so short a time, that I can not be of consequence to you; and when I am gone, this passing fancy, which is more than half pity, will die away."

"Never!"

"Indeed, it will. You are sorry for me now, and you think that a more lasting feeling influences you; but when I have left you, you will speedily forget me, and rejoice that my blindness has saved you from yourself."

As I spoke, he started from his chair, walked impatiently across the room, then returned, and standing before me, said, in a voice husky with suppressed emotion,

"Florence, listen to me!"

I looked up, for the tones were so strange that I was startled. His face, usually so pale, was flushed and resolute; his eyes flashing, and upon his lofty brow and temples the blue veins stood in high relief. An extraordinary change seemed to have come over him; and (as I had been years before, with my cousin Philip) I was frightened into silence.

"Florence, listen to me!" he said; "and strive to believe me; for even for the short acquaintance of which only you are willing to allow me the benefit, you seem to know strangely little of me. I have told you that I love you—that the joy or desolation of my whole life lies in your power—and you appear to doubt and disbelieve me: mocking my earnest words, with an assurance that ere long I shall be thankful that you did so."

"This may be mere maiden modesty, or false appreciation of your own worth; and if so, oh, how humbly and joyfully I shall sue for pardon of my misapprehension! But if not, tell me, Florence, what false seeming have you found in me, which should give you a right to say, that in offering you my heart and seeking yours in return, I do but offer and ask what I neither wish to give, nor care to gain."

He paused, fixing upon mine his large indignant eyes. Never before had he looked so handsome and so worthy of respect as then he did, standing there in his angry vindication. For the first time, I really admired him. Hitherto, I had thought him good and kind, but tame-spirited and commonplace; and now in this fiery outbreak I scarcely recognized him. I was embarrassed and grieved, and replied with difficulty,

"Forgive me, if I have offended you! I did not intend to do so. But in my present circumstances, portionless and forlorn, without even the poor dowry of my family's good name, it seemed impossible that any one should choose but shun me."

The words came laggingly, for I was very wretched, and the tears which pride forbade to fall, impeded my utterance.

In an instant he was by my side again; all vehemence had subsided, and with a voice low and pitying as the tones one listens to in dreams, he exclaimed,

"Forgive me, Florence! forgive the rash and hasty words which have caused you pain, and made you do yourself so much injustice as to believe that fortune or popularity could add to the value of your own true worth. What to me, or to any one who desired your love, is fortune or position compared with yourself, your generous nature, and unselfish heart? Oh, Florence, dearest! he who loves you once will love you ever; and you will be as precious to him though dowered by poverty itself, as if you were the heiress of millions. For myself, dearest, I can only see in the reasons you have assigned as sufficient cause for the loss of friends, so many grounds why those who loved you before, should cherish you now more fondly still. But if some think otherwise, fear not, Florence, nor heed them; only trust yourself to me, and as far as human power avails to shield you from sorrow or annoyance, mine shall be exerted till you learn to think that grief is but a poet's fiction."

As he spoke he took my hand, and the action roused me from the half-dreamy state into which I had fallen. I was so thoroughly wretched, so heart-stung by my mother's letter, so miserable and shame-stricken still, at the memory of the last few weeks at Ingerdyne, so hopeless and desponding for the future, that I felt as if all I cared for on earth would be the privilege to lie down and die. And now, to add to all this, was the grief of finding that I was about to return evil for good, and give pain to the most generous heart and truest friend I could ever hope to meet. For noble, honorable, excellent as he was, I did not love him; and, though I was careless of my own fate, yet I felt that he deserved better at my hands, than to be suffered to link himself to one whose heart and affections were so entirely uninterested as mine.

With all these emotions filling my heart at once, no wonder that I was so bewildered as scarcely to be conscious of what was being said, and that it required something more than words, to rouse me from my trance-like apathy.

This was supplied by the pressure of my hand; when with a sudden start, which after my passive silence must have seemed like delirium, I rose from my seat, and shaking off Mr. Spencer's touch, exclaimed rapidly,

"It is impossible! With my whole heart I am grateful to you, and deeply, truly sensible of the honor of your preference; but forgive me that I can not return it. Do not reproach me for having seemed to encourage attentions of which, so absorbed have I been in my own selfish sorrows, I never suspected the cause. The bitterest words you could speak can not add to the shame and sorrow that I feel, nor make me condemn myself more thoroughly: but, indeed, I am less culpable than wretched. Had circumstances been different—were my heart—"

"And is it not, Florence? Surely I have not been deceived!" he exclaimed, vehemently.

I felt the angry blood rush to my brow at this implied accusation; but a moment's reflection showed me the injustice of such a feeling, and I replied,

"You misunderstand me. Situated as I now

am, I will never marry. Many years, if not the whole of my life, must be devoted to my mother. While she is in sorrow, nothing but her own commands shall part us. I will and ought to labor for her; and, even were it to secure my own happiness, I will never consent to accept a home from which she and Helen would be excluded; nor to burthen my husband with my family. Therefore, upon this ground, had I no other, I must, although most grateful for the honor you have done me, decline it absolutely and forever."

"Oh, not forever, Florence! Not forever! Give me some hope: some cheering word to cling to; something to live for. Say that you do not despise me; that in time you may—"

"I shall be still the same; forgive my plain speaking, but I have done you too much wrong already to deceive you now. Twenty years hence, as to-day, I believe that my reply will be the same."

A short silence followed, which was broken by the sound of Mrs. Spencer's voice in the hall, speaking to some one as she came toward the breakfast-room door.

This caused Mr. Spencer to say, hastily, although sorrowfully,

"One word more, Florence, and I will be silent. I am sure that you will answer me frankly, if only for the sake of the last few weeks' delusive happiness. Am I pleading for a treasure already given? Is your heart bestowed upon another?"

"No."

"Then, despite of all you have said, I will hope on. Time is God's great agent here; not only for righting wrongs, but for bringing unlooked-for things to pass. And constancy is even now sometimes rewarded; so I will take for my motto those resolute words on the ancient seal, and 'while I breathe, I'll hope.' Fear not that I shall blame you, even in thought, if, through my own willfulness, my life passes thus fruitlessly away; the last few weeks have been as a life to me, and in them I have laid the foundation of a love that will only expire with life itself. I can not give it up at will; nor would I, if I could. This is my unchangeable resolve; but from this hour you shall hear it no more. I will press my suit no farther, but trust to time and your own heart: both, after a while, will, I think, plead for me. And to what you have said respecting your mother and Helen, I reply thus: thanks to my good uncle, I am rich, not enough to purchase and keep up Ingerdyne in the style your father did, but quite enough to make my wife so far independent, that from her own income she can maintain in perfect comfort those who rely upon her for a daughter's and sister's love. And when, won over by my constant affection, she has learned to love me well enough in return—to believe that her joys and sorrows are mine, and that to give her pleasure will be to insure my own; then I shall hope that, seeing her family is mine also, she will never dream that I can feel them a burthen."

Before I could reply, the door opened, and Mrs. Spencer entered, saying,

"Frank, have you forgotten your promise to drive Florence and me to H— to-day? the horses have been standing at the door for nearly half an hour."

"Indeed, I had, mother. But I shall be ready

now before either of you. I have only to write a letter to my agent, and then I shall be at your service."

As soon as he had left the room, the good old lady turned to me, exclaiming,

"How ill you look, my dear! you are as pale as a ghost. And how cold your hands are! dear me, I hope you've not got this nasty fever that's about. I really must speak to Frank and tell him to drive us first to Dr. Seaforth's (he was telling me only yesterday that he had thirty cases of fever on his list), and then if he finds you have any of the symptoms, we can return instantly. It's a dreadful time of year for fever. I've known one, beginning now, hang about a person for months. I'll go and see Frank directly."

And without waiting for a reply, she hurried out of the room, and by the direction of her retreating footsteps, I knew that she was gone to the study.

To prophesy, and then to nurse an illness, was Mrs. Spencer's hobby; and I knew that a series of visits from her pet physician, teapots full of herb tea, days in my own room, and nights under the vigilant care of her sleepless maid, would all fall to my lot, unless I convinced her by the activity of my movements, that, from whatever else I might be suffering, low fever was certainly not "hanging about me."

Accordingly I ran quickly up stairs, and with a celerity very strongly at variance with the heaviness of my heart, dressed myself in the most elaborate costume I possessed; hoping, with the aid of furs and lace, a muffling veil and pink bonnet-lining, to give my pale face a less ghastly hue, and my drooping figure a less invalidish appearance.

To my great satisfaction I succeeded admirably; Mrs. Spencer being obliged to confess that—"though there was evidently something serious the matter, yet that it certainly had not the character of low fever."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DURING our drive, I obtained the relief of silence by the introduction into the carriage of a nervous friend of my hostess, whose complaints were endless, and formed an inexhaustible topic of conversation between herself and her sympathizing companion. After the first few sentences of general greeting, the reverie into which I naturally fell after the late painful interview with Mr. Spencer, was not interrupted by a single word from either of my neighbors, and I had ample leisure to reflect and determine upon the necessity of leaving Abberly the next day. I felt that it was now impossible to stay; and, although my welcome in London was more than doubtful, still I owed it to my own delicacy to proceed thither at once.

But, like many other wise and well-laid plans, this was doomed to disappointment; for Mr. Spencer had scarcely joined his mother and myself after dinner, when the evening mail came in, bringing with it the following letter from Helen:

"DEAR FLOR.—Mamma desires me to write and tell you, that she has accepted for me and

herself, Mrs. Malin's delightful invitation to spend the winter with her in Brighton. She has taken a darling house there, in the most fashionable situation, and we went yesterday to Long Acre to choose a pony carriage, which I am to learn to drive on the Parade. I am so happy. Mrs. Malin says every body is in Brighton now, so we shall have parties continually. I can't think how you like remaining at that stupid Abberly: but you and I never were alike, and mamma says the country suits you best, as you can ride all day long there if you choose; and Mrs. Malin says she's sure that you and she wouldn't suit each other at all. As soon as we are settled, I will write; but I suppose you will have no time for letters now. I am just going with Mrs. Malin to fix upon the colors for the carriage lining, so good-by.

Yours affectionately,

"HELEN.

"P.S.—I open my letter again, in a great hurry, to ask you to lend me those nice pearls that Mr. Lyle gave you. I will take great care of them, and you will be certain not to want them at that horrid stupid Abberly. Send them here, and I will get Mrs. Malin to give orders that the parcel is sent down to Brighton."

For a long time I sat speechless, gazing on this heartless epistle. I could not think: like waves, my thoughts came rolling on one after another, each new one obliterating the last; till my mind, agonized with its conflicting emotions, seemed to give way at once; and with an unconscious cry of utter misery, I fell back upon the sofa on which I sat, and, covering my face with my hands, clasped my beating temples closely.

In an instant Mr. Spencer, who had been watching me attentively, was beside me: while his mother followed, exclaiming,

"Dear me! dear me! Florence, darling, what is the matter? Is it that letter? Read it, Frank, and see if— No, I don't mean that; but what is it, love?"

I could not reply: words and tears, either of which might have relieved me, were denied. I sat like a statue; and although my brain ached madly with the consciousness of grief, yet my ideas were so confused, that even to myself I could not define what had happened, nor for what I was suffering. Mr. Spencer saw this, and said,

"Let her alone, mother. Florence will tell you all presently; but now she will be better left to herself and quiet."

"Nonsense, my dear! That's quite a man's idea of trouble: it might do all very well for you, but women don't like it; it does them good to have somebody to tell their troubles to. Now, Flory, darling, tell me what has vexed you. Is it that letter? Well, I thought so. Is it bad news from your mother or sister? Are they ill? Do speak, Flory! I can't bear to see you so miserable. It must be something very bad to make you look so wretched. Is it any thing I can help you in—any thing that I can do?"

"No, no! oh, no!" I cried; "no one can help me. I am alone in the world."

"Oh, Flory!" exclaimed the old lady, in a tone of sorrowful reproach, "that must be indeed a sad letter to make you speak so."

Mr. Spencer walked to the opposite side of the

room; while I, ashamed of my seeming ingratitude, replied,

"Forgive me, dear Mrs. Spencer, for I am very unhappy. Read that letter, and see if I have not cause to say that I am alone."

"Well, dear child!" said she, when she had read the letter, and looking up through her spectacles with a smile, half puzzled, half pleased. "And is this all you have been fretting about? The idea of this giddy young lassie and your mother spending a gay winter in Brighton, while you are moping with us? I did not think, Flory, that you were so fond of parties and merry-makings; but since you are, why I'll see what 'stupid Abberly' can do to amuse you."

"No, no! you can not think so! It is not that; but they cast me off—despite me. Oh, mother! mother!" and leaning my head upon the pitying old lady's shoulder, I wept bitterly.

"Oh! Flory, I wish I were—with all my heart darling, I wish I were!" she replied, weeping for sympathy, and misunderstanding my ejaculation. "You've a strange hard-hearted family altogether, I think. But never mind; try and forget them, and make yourself happy with us. I'll be your mother now, Flory; but perhaps after a while the relationship may grow more distant, and I may only be an aunt; eh, Frank?"

For several days following this, I was very ill; nor, with my mind in the harassed state in which it appeared likely to remain, did it seem very probable that I should speedily rally. Painfully as I have often been placed since, I do not think I ever occupied a more embarrassing position than I did then.

My mother's home, being only under the roof of a friend, was none to me. I had no right to it; nor could I, in any event, dare to rely upon its shelter for an hour. I had so little money that I could not procure a home for myself; and, even if I could, it was a grave question whether I ought, and where I could go.

I could not take a situation as governess, even were I fortunate enough to obtain the opportunity; for I could not tell how soon the hour might come, as come it surely would, when I should be essential to my mother. No: I had no refuge, no choice, but to remain in the house of a man whose hand I had refused, and from whose roof every feeling of dignity and delicacy called upon me to retire at once.

People talk well and cleverly about the impossibility of things being really right, when appearances are so plainly wrong; but I learned a lesson that winter at Abberly which I have never forgotten, and upon which I have acted ever since: never, under any circumstances, to trust to, or judge from appearances; for many a bitter wrong is often done to an innocent person, for the sole reason that he, or she, being but human, can not control them.

"For let appearances be what they will,
You never so can shape them, that evil men
Will not their own construction put upon them."

Much of this specious injustice was soon done me at Abberly. Every body knew my circumstances: every body knew, as old Mrs. Jenks, the retired grocer's wife, said, "that the girl hadn't one shilling to lay a' top of another;" and every body knew that Frank Spencer, in succeeding to his uncle's property and practice, had inherited at least three thousand a year, besides

his paternal fortune and that very handsome one which his aunt would leave him.

Every body knew, therefore, that the young lawyer was, in common parlance, "a good match;" and, judging from appearances, they all decided that I was an artful, designing girl, ingratiating myself with the aunt for the sake of her nephew; and, in their eloquent language, "making a dead set at him."

Nothing, meanwhile, could exceed the delicacy of Mr. Spencer's conduct. There was nothing in his manner to betray to those around us, that his feeling to me was any other, or stronger, than that of a host to his guest; while to myself he never insinuated, by word or innuendo, that he remembered and remained steadfast to his self-imposed pledge of constancy.

Still, though he spoke and acted as usual, it was evident that he was ill at ease; and people now began, not without reason, to comment upon his altered appearance. Whenever remarks of this kind reached his ears, as they often did, he invariably laughed them off, attributing his ill looks to over-work in his profession; but although he strove thus to divert the gossip of his neighbors, it was impossible so to deceive his mother and myself: we knew that office anxieties had nothing to do with the change, and, after a time, Mrs. Spencer suspected the truth.

No sooner had she done so than she interrogated me closely; and from that day all my peace at Abberly was gone. Devoted to her adopted son, conscious of his worth, and fully alive to his many estimable qualities, she felt nothing but indignation against me for refusing his hand. In her eyes he was a fitting match for the best and greatest woman in the land; and in proportion as she loved and appreciated him, she was wrathful against me for causing him pain.

I do not think she intended to make me so miserable as she did; although I am sure that she rejoiced in seeing my discomfort, looking upon it as some sort of punishment for my rejection of her favorite. But, whether she knew it or not, she certainly succeeded in making my life a burthen to me.

Morning, noon, and night, the moment we were alone, her open or implied reproaches began: not with harsh, or bitter, or violent words—in such she was too gentle and lady-like to indulge—but those hardest things of all to bear, the reproaches of grieved and disappointed affection. Every change in her son's countenance, every flush upon his face, every weariness in his manner, were treasured up and commented upon; and, with a prophecy that he would surely die, she invariably ended in a flood of tears, and by asking me how I could be so cruel and insensible?

In this way matters went on for many weeks, until I became so nervous and dejected, that I am sure had Mr. Spencer at that time again asked me to become his wife, I should have accepted him, merely from the hope to escape persecution.

But the following incident, occurring during the spring, assisted to bring affairs to a different *crisis*.

We were all sitting one day after luncheon by an open window, enjoying the freshness of the air after a light shower of rain, when Dr. Seaforth called. His visit was to Mr. Spencer, who was suffering from a lingering cold, which had brought

in its train an equally tedious cough; and certainly we all richly deserved the physician's reproof, for encouraging his patient in choosing a seat where he could inhale nothing but chilling vapors from the earth, nor any air except such as reached him in draughts.

"I really should not have expected this imprudence from you, Mrs. Spencer," said the doctor, in concluding his harangue. "I thought you were more discreet than to allow a man with a cough like that, to do such an insane thing; it's enough to establish him upon the high road to consumption."

A long conversation ensued, and the invalid (who happened to be in very low spirits, and not inclined to laugh, as usual, at physicians' prophecies and advice) entered into a discussion upon the various kinds and symptoms of consumption, and finally left the room with his friend for a private conference.

No sooner had they retired, than the tears which had been trembling in Mrs. Spencer's eyes during the whole time of Dr. Seaforth's visit, fell unrestrainedly, and she exclaimed, pathetically,

"I wonder how you can bear it, Florence: that I do!"

I made no reply; for my conscience upbraided me loudly: not so much for my inability to return her son's attachment, as for my selfishness in remaining an inmate of his house; receiving from him nothing but kindness, and returning nothing but pain.

I hated myself: and the more I thought, the more angry I became. For to what did I, or could I object, in my suitor? Morally and mentally, in fortune, birth, manner, and appearance, he was unexceptionable; and his constancy to me ought to have been sufficient to win for him the love of any disengaged heart. But so perverse is the will, that I do believe in that very thing lay the great secret of my indifference. Had he been less patient, less kind, and less forbearing—more like my cousin Philip in his fiery temper and scornful bearing; in fact, had he thought less of me and more of himself, his suit would have prospered better. And the consciousness of this—which, do as I would, forced itself upon me—made me appear unreasonable and contemptible in my own eyes, and kept me silent.

For several minutes Mrs. Spencer continued to weep and talk, without seeming to expect or desire a reply; but at last she said, with a more sorrowful burst of emotion than before,

"You will be sorry for this some day, Florence. Such things always come home to people: and it's very right they should. When I think how I have loved you—as well as if you had been my own child—I can hardly believe that it is you who are bringing all this misery upon me. But it's always the way; the more you care for other people, the less they care for you. I've known it all my life; and yet, like a simpleton, expected comfort and love from you!"

"And I do love you, dear Mrs. Spencer! Your own daughter could not love you more. But I can not extend that love at pleasure. Love, like life, can not be given at will."

"Nonsense, Florence! It is too late to talk so now. If you knew that it was not your will to return Frank's love, it ought at least not to have been your will to encourage it!"

"I never did; indeed, I never did. Mr. Spencer would not do me the injustice to say that I did."

"No; for he will not suffer me to speak to him on the subject; and if he would, he would say nothing against you."

"I do believe it," I replied. Mr. Spencer is too just and kind to make a false accusation even against an enemy."

"But why will you be his enemy, Florence? You, whom he loves so well. So good, and honorable, and true-hearted as he is, what can you object to? Where will you find his equal, much less his superior?"

"Nowhere."

"Then why will you be so stubborn, Flory? Why will you refuse to make him happy, and me too? You know how much I love you; how I shall rejoice to give up my place here to you, relying upon you for the care and tenderness of a daughter. Think how peaceful and happy you will make my old age, and how honored and beloved you will pass through life, both blessing and blessed! All that I have—"

"Oh, cease, dear—dear Mrs. Spencer! You surely could not be satisfied with such a heart as mine. Nor dare I marry in the present condition of my mother's affairs."

"Ah! if that were all, they could be easily arranged. What would be yours at my death I will give you now; and that, with a share of your pin-money, will surely be enough for your mother and sister, however exacting they may be. Do not refuse me! Oh, Flory, do not refuse!" and seizing both my hands, she looked into my face with such an earnest entreaty that I was nearly overcome.

"What can I do or say?" I exclaimed. "I would gladly lay down my life to make yours happy; but how can I affect a love I do not feel, or deceive your son by giving him a wife whose affections are so unmoved, as to be utterly unworthy of him. Ah! dear Mrs. Spencer, spare us both."

"From what, Flory?"

"From a life of disappointment and dissatisfaction. We are not fitted for each other; and nothing but sorrow could follow from the union of two such opposite natures."

"That is a girl's romance, Flory! For my sake, whom you profess to love, think better of it. You see how wretchedly he is altered by your cruelty. Oh, do not rob me of him!"

"This is merciless," I exclaimed, in great agitation. "You are urging me too far; beyond what any one has a right to do. You are taking an ungenerous advantage of my unhappy position to induce me to concede what my judgment refuses. It is you who are cruel."

"Florence!" began the old lady; but before she could utter another syllable, Mr. Spencer stood before us, with the flush of anger upon his brow, and his voice hoarse with indignation, saying,

"Florence is right, mother! and love for me must have strangely warped your usual keen sense of delicacy and honor, when you could so far forget the duties of hospitality, and the dignity of a woman, as to urge an unwelcome suit—and that suit your son's—upon your guest."

Then addressing me, he said,

"Florence, you will, I know, acquit me of

any part or knowledge of the persecution you have suffered. Your own sense of honor will assure you that it would be impossible for any one, with the feelings of a gentleman, and the proper self-respect of a man, to condescend, even for the sake of gaining his dearest wishes, to such unworthy means. How my mother has gained the knowledge she has used so indiscreetly, I can not tell; how she can have suffered her affection for me so to have outrun her judgment, as to use it in the way I have just heard, I can not imagine. I must forgive it, for the sake of the many years of unflinching kindness I have received at her hands; but *you*, Florence?"

"Can readily forgive the little I have to pardon, for the same reason. It ought to need something more than a few hasty words to obliterate the memory of such friendship as I have enjoyed during the last few sorrowful months—and which, alas! I am so soon to lose; for I must leave you to-morrow."

"Oh, no, Flory! don't say so: don't go," exclaimed Mrs. Spencer, eagerly, through her tears.

"I must; indeed, I must. I have no choice. I had a letter from Helen this morning, written in the deepest distress. Mrs. Malin has died suddenly, and her son, with whom she was through life upon very painful terms, has, in taking possession of her effects and property, insulted my mother and Helen in the most unwarrantable manner. They will be in town to-morrow, and I must be there to meet them. My mother relies upon me. I did not mention this before, because, until I had written to Helen, and promised to be in London at the time she names, I knew that you would kindly urge my stay here; and it is not wise, you know, to put oneself in the way of temptation."

"They must come here; must they not Frank," cried Mrs. Spencer. "You must not go, Flory; we can not spare you. I shall be miserable when you are gone. They must come here."

"It is impossible. The time for action, for which I have so long been waiting, is come at last; and I ought to be thankful that the trial has been delayed so long, not murmur that it has arrived now."

"But what shall I do, Flory, when you are gone? Who is to take your place to me? Who can ever be to me what you are? Whom shall I ever love half so well?" sobbed the old lady. "And I know that you will not be happy either," she added. "It is not for love that they send for you, but for what you can do to guide and help them; and you know that well."

"Perhaps; but how does that alter my duty?"

"It may not alter the duty; but it certainly does alter the way in which it may be performed," said Mr. Spencer.

"How?"

"In this way. If your mother and sister send for you out of pure love, and because, in their sorrow they pine for your affection and sympathy, then you ought to go; because nothing but your presence can supply their want. But if they, having scorned your society while they had no need of it, now claim it because you are brave and self-sacrificing, and they know your energy will find out some way for their support, *then* your duty may assume another shape, and if you can give them the aid they require, without

giving what they do not value—except as the agent of relief—you certainly may and ought to do so.”

“I do not understand you.”

“No, Flory?” exclaimed Mrs. Spencer, “I think it is very plain. But now let me speak. And try if I can make you understand in my way. You and I have often agreed that money is only valuable for the comforts it procures, and the help it enables us to give to others: and we have said, over and over again, that it never ought to be weighed against happiness, and that if either of us had the means to assist the other at her need, it would be no sacrifice, because we should receive the recompense we preferred. Well, what we have agreed to so often, I want to put in practice: not exactly in the way I should like best, but in the only way I think your pride will suffer you to accept my aid: for, wisely as you talk, Flory, I am afraid that your pride, and not your wisdom, will be your counselor now. Your society is dearer to me than any thing on earth except my son, and to secure that, I wish to make an exchange with you—to drive a hard bargain, Flory—giving you what to me is valueless, in exchange for what is priceless—your time for my gold. Whatever by any calculation you can earn for your family in London, I will pay you to stay with me. My income is larger than I ever spend; and, since you are too proud to share it as a free-will gift, you shall have the satisfaction of earning it: thus you will do your duty to your mother, by giving her what she requires, and make me happy too.”

I hesitated; not as to what I should do, but how to refuse this indiscreet, but most generous offer in the least offensive terms; for in her zeal to serve me, I saw that Mrs. Spencer had quite forgotten the position in which I stood with her son.

Happily, therefore, for me, just as I was about to reply, and just as the eagerness of Mrs. Spencer’s manner yielded to a painful confusion, which showed that the impossibility of the arrangement she had proposed, suddenly occurred to her, the door was thrown open, and visitors, self-invited to spend the day, were ushered in.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE next day, after a most distressing scene, I left Abberley.

The coach was unoccupied except by myself, and, until it stopped to change horses at the end of the first stage, nothing occurred to divert my thoughts from dwelling upon the parting tears and grief of the good old lady I had left. But when we reached the roadside inn by the eighth mile-stone, beside which stood the four horses with which we were to go on, the tones of a well-known voice caused me to start forward on my seat. They were Mr. Spencer’s answering the passing salutation of a gentleman. In an instant after, he came to the coach-door, saying,

“We shall have a charming day. The sky is without a cloud.”

“We? why, where are you going?”

“To London: how astonished you look! Did you think, Florence, that I should suffer you to go alone?”

The deep love of his heart betrayed itself in the very tones of his voice; but, as if aware of it, he rallied immediately, and added,

“My mother would scarcely trust a basket of china on one of these awful four-horse vehicles without an escort, how then do you think she would trust a timid young lady like you? Besides, impossible as it may seem to you that any one can have business in London except yourself, I have a great deal there just now. Six common-law actions and two Chancery suits; three bad debts that I want my agent to make me an allowance for; five cases for counsel to advise upon, besides a host of other legal matters. I want to have an interview with the famous Quack Doctor respecting this cough of mine; then I want to hear those wonderful bullfinches that Dr. Seaforth told us about yesterday; next, I want to choose my mother a new cap, and last, not least, I want to consult my tailor. But, hark! there’s Waterhouse calling. Coming! All right! Good-by, for the next stage.”

And as he divided these last sentences between me and the coachman, the latter called out impatiently, “Now then, sir!” to which hint his passenger responded by catching the rail of the box seat, and with one step and spring establishing himself by his side.

The day was far advanced when we arrived in London, and as I was anxious to conclude my journey as quickly as possible, Mr. Spencer ordered a coach, and insisted upon accompanying me to my mother’s lodgings.

When we reached them, we found that my mother and Helen (who had, contrary to their first intention, come up from Brighton the day before) were gone out.

“They expected you, miss, about two o’clock,” said the servant, “and as you didn’t come, the lady said she couldn’t wait dinner, but would have it as soon as it was ready, and then go for a walk or call on some lady in one of the squares.”

“Did my mother say when she should return? Did she leave no message for me?”

“No, miss, she only said she mightn’t be back to tea.”

“Then I vote that you order it at once, and invite me to be a partaker,” said Mr. Spencer gayly, endeavoring to chase away the gloom which he saw steal over me at this singular reception. “Remember we have had no dinner, and not a superabundant luncheon, therefore if you are not the very genius of inhospitality herself, you can do no less than offer me a share of the good things you would otherwise monopolize. Mary, Miss Sackville will take tea immediately.”

During the meal scarcely a word was spoken; for my heart was full of mortification and apprehension, and the melancholy contrast every thing about me presented to the elegance of Ingerdyne and the old-fashioned comfort of Abberley, struck me with dismay.

Every thing was tidy—oh, so tidy! as if nothing was ever to be removed from its place. The tables seemed to have grown up slowly from the floor with the house itself, so old and thin and worn they looked. The carpet had once been ornamented with some sort of pattern, for here and there, under the edge of the well-darned hearth-rug and beneath the ends of the curtains, there were still faint traces of red and yellow

hieroglyphics; but those days were long past, and nothing now remained but a well-brushed, threadbare, napless covering, affording neither warmth nor beauty, and in comparison to the poverty-stricken look of which, clean white boards would have been far preferable.

Along the wall, relieved at intervals by the door, the fireplace, and the window, stood six chairs; and so exactly were the distances of each measured from the others, that one's first impression upon seeing them always was, that they were indigenous to the soil, and the next, an involuntary sensation of surprise that they moved upon being pushed. Over the chimney-piece was a long, narrow slip of looking-glass, divided into three parts by slips of black wood intended to represent ebony, and held together by a worn and rickety gilt frame. The glass leaned forward at such an angle with the wall, that it appeared to be intended solely for the benefit of the fender and fire-irons, ancient and worn like itself, whose deplorable meagreness it seemed cruel to reflect.

The curtains made of a chintz that might have hung round a bed of some old country house in Queen Elizabeth's time, and from which the sun and the wash-tub had extracted all brightness of color, hung down in melancholy scantiness by the windows, which were smeared as if with recent attempts at cleaning; and the whole house, with its keen, hungry-looking mistress and pert little servant, matched the "drawing-room" well. However, the place had certainly this merit—every thing was in keeping.

It may seem very absurd to those who have never reflected how much the human mind is influenced by outward circumstances, to hear me say how all these discomforts weighed upon my spirits. But there are certain proprieties which, to people accustomed to them, become not so much elegances, as necessities of life; and the loss of which affects the spirits, and depresses the energies, far more than absolute suffering. How much truth is there in these lines of Miss Landon:—

Life's smallest miseries are perhaps its worst.
Great sufferings have great strength. There is a pride
In the bold energy that braves the worst,
And bears, proud in the bearing; but the heart
Consumes with those small sorrows, and small shames,
Which crave, yet can not ask for sympathy.
We blush that they exist; and yet how keen
The pang that they inflict!

Throughout that phase of my life which here commenced, I found it far easier to bear a scant supply of what men call the needs of life, than the absence of those little elegances which long habit had made necessary. I never felt how poor we were until that evening in M—— Street; and then, for the first time, I realized the change.

Had I arrived to a foodless table, and before me had been opened at once a course of labor and activity, I could have borne it cheerfully; addressing myself to work with energy. But the multitude of petty miserable shifts and meanesses thrust upon me on all sides, dejected and subdued me.

Mr. Spencer and I had finished our meal when my mother and sister returned.

"Ah, Florence!" was my mother's first salutation, "how late you came! When you were not here at two o'clock, I ceased to expect you

until to-morrow. How could you think of traveling so far in the afternoon?"

"Oh, Flory! isn't this a horrid place?" cried Helen, almost in tears. "Do, pray, do something to get us out of it."

"I will do all I can, Helen; little though, I'm afraid, it will be. But, mother, you are not aware that you have a visitor, Mr. Spencer, who has kindly escorted me from Abberly, and to whom I have been doing the honors in your absence."

"Indeed! I really must apologize. I was certainly not aware of your presence, Mr. Spencer. You left your mother well, I hope. She is not with you, of course: there is nothing during the recess to bring people to town; although I should have been delighted had she thought otherwise, and afforded me an opportunity of thanking her for her kindness to my daughter."

"My mother was only too happy in being allowed to retain Miss Sackville so long: although I fear we can not flatter ourselves that the regret she feels at parting with her is mutual. Abberly is a sad dull place, Miss Helen, is it not?"

"Oh, dreadful!" answered Helen, with a little shudder. "I would not live there for the world; and the people are such oddities. I used to think the Abberly people who came now and then to Ashton would have been treasures to a museum."

And, as if she had forgotten that she was then addressing one of their quaint tribe, she tossed her fair ringlets and laughed gayly, as of old.

"Ah, Miss Helen!" said Mr. Spencer. "I see you will not be on my side: the petition my mother prefers to Mrs. Sackville, by me, will have no supporter in you."

"Petition! what is it? I am in a very liberal mood to-night, since Florence has come to take us away from this den of gloom and horrors. I will advocate any thing, except her going away without mamma and me."

"My petition is a bold one, and has reference to you all," replied Mr. Spencer.

"To me?" said my mother with an air of indifference. "I am sure I shall be most happy to gratify Mrs. Spencer in any way I can."

"There! now you have mamma's promise, I will give you mine; so tell me what your petition is?"

"No less than to bring you, Mrs. Sackville, and your sister, to enliven my mother's solitude during the summer, by going down to the 'museum' storehouse. I wish to spend a few months in Scotland this year; my mother naturally shrinks from remaining at Abberly so long alone; and, though she can not hope to make it as pleasant to you as Brighton, still she ventures to trust that it will not be altogether disagreeable."

"Oh, do let us go, mamma!" cried Helen, eagerly: "at least you and me. Flory, I dare say, will wish to stay here to see about the settling, and all that; but we can do no good, and I should so like to go."

"You forget, my darling, that it is impossible," said my mother. "I must remain in town until something is arranged. Pray, present my compliments and thanks to your mother, Mr. Spencer, and tell her how much gratification it would give me, under other circumstances, to

accept her invitation; but that at present it is impossible."

"Let me hope that you will alter your determination," urged Mr. Spencer.

"Thank you, you are very good; but I see no prospect of it. Affairs are at present in so perplexed and hopeless a state, that it is absolutely necessary some exertion should be made at once."

"Can I be of any service?" asked Mr. Spencer. "I am, you know, a lawyer; and, as you are aware, have some knowledge of your affairs already. Therefore, if I can be useful, pray make no scruple in employing me."

"Do mamma! Do let Mr. Spencer and Flory manage these tiresome affairs," cried Helen.

"Flory loves business, and I detest it."
"Well, my love, we will talk about it to-morrow; and if I think that Florence can arrange matters without us, I shall be very glad to please you, and accept Mrs. Spencer's kind invitation. Your mother will find Helen a much more lively companion than Florence, I think, Mr. Spencer."

He bowed.

"But do not set your heart upon a visit to Abberly, dearest," she continued, addressing Helen; "for I very much fear that we shall find it impossible to accomplish it. I will do all I can, and so of course will Florence—for I confess that I can not bear the thought of your being harassed with the details of business—but still I have very little hope. Helen is not constituted to bear the world's rough treatment; she is too sensitive," said my mother, turning to her guest.

"Oh, I could never endure what Flory does!" exclaimed Helen.

"Few women could," said Mr. Spencer, dryly.

"You are right, Mr. Spencer," replied my mother; "but Florence was always unlike every other girl. From a child she cultivated a spirit of independence of control, which enables her to do now what a different or more tender nature, like her sister's, would shrink from. She was never intended for a quiet life; she will combat the storm like a heroine."

Mr. Spencer's eye sought mine as my mother said this; and, unable to bear its expression, I turned away and gazed vacantly at the closed windows.

"Have you seen Captain Sackville, since you arrived in town?" asked he, after a pause.

"No. I hear that he is in Wales; but at present I have neither seen nor heard from him."

"Have you written, may I ask?"

"Yes, through his agents; but I have had no reply."

"You will not think me impertinent, I trust, if I venture to inquire what your projects are? Under existing circumstances, it seems imperative that some communication should be opened at once with Captain Sackville."

"Yes, I think so: although how it is to be effected, I can not tell."

"Pending its accomplishment, have you formed any plans, or fixed upon any course?"

"No. But I am a wretched woman of business; I must leave all such things to Florence: she has innumerable resources."

"Oh, yes! Flory loves business; she is so clever and active. It would have killed me to have been at dear Ingerdyne among all those

horrible men," said Helen, with her bewitching smile; "but Flory did not mind it. I wish I was as brave."

She evidently expected a compliment in reply to this, but instead, there came upon her listener's lip a slight curl, which she did not like: so she continued—

"I am so tired, and so idle. Therefore, as I can't help you in your discussion, I may as well wish you all good-night. Good-night, Mr. Spencer: I hope, since you are such a *chevalier aux dames*, we shall see you in the morning to inquire how Flory has rested; so I shall only say good-night to you. Come up stairs soon, Flory; I have such a love of an album to show you."

After Helen's departure, a long conversation ensued between my mother and Mr. Spencer, in which I took no part. Throughout the whole of it, she spoke, and seemed to think, of me as of a puppet, having no choice, no will, but hers; nor any power of acting, apart from her permission. No Turkish slave was ever more completely looked upon as her master's property, than I was treated by my mother as hers. But I did not resent it by word or look: I was too proud, and too deeply hurt for such common-places. A sort of sullen indifference to my fate, a recklessness as to what I was bid to do, had come over me; and I felt as if life or death, joy or sorrow, labor or ease, were alike to me.

Presently the conversation turned upon a letter which Mr. Spencer requested to see, and my mother left the room to search for it. I raised my head languidly as the door closed after her, but rested it immediately upon my hand again; and not a word was spoken.

This lasted about a quarter of an hour, when the servant entered to say that Mrs. Sackville could not find the letter, and that if Mr. Spencer would excuse her while she looked through another desk, or allow her to defer it until the next morning, she would then show it to him.

"Give my compliments to Mrs. Sackville, and request her not to trouble herself any further to-night," said Mr. Spencer: "to-morrow will do as well."

The moment the girl was gone, Mr. Spencer started from his seat and came impetuously toward me, taking the hand which lay passive upon my knee—

"Florence!" he exclaimed, "dearest, dearest Florence, look up! Do not seem so heart-broken and desolate, or I shall go mad; if, indeed, I am not so already. I can not endure to see you so undervalued and sacrificed as you are here; nor could you live long to bear it. Come back, then, with me to Abberly; leave it with us to reconcile your family to your absence, and return to my mother, who will welcome you with open arms. Come back, and find in our affection a compensation for that which is denied to you here; and gladden my mother's declining years with your love and tenderness. For me, do with me as you will. I love you so well that I can give up all hope of being more or nearer to you than a friend, if thus I can best secure your happiness: that is dearer to me than my own, and there is not upon earth a sacrifice I should not esteem it a privilege to make, so that by it you were benefited. Only let me see you happy, and I shall be content. Therefore dis-

card all scruples, dearest, and return with me; trust me, you shall never regret it."

"I am sure of it," I answered earnestly; "but it is impossible."

"Not, surely, if I obtain your mother's consent."

"Yes, even then. I have not my own."

"Florence!"

"Are you surprised? After what I said to you long since, when these difficulties first commenced, how did you expect me to act when the time for action came? Did you think the first unloving words would frighten me from my duty, and that to escape even continual misconception I should forsake those whom I am bound to assist?"

"No! but what can you do? Only show me that, and I will try to be satisfied. With all your willingness to sacrifice yourself for those who will neither appreciate, nor give you credit for it, what can you do? This is a hard world to wrest a living from."

"Yes; but I have great faith in myself, in the power of will, and the energy of a firm purpose."

He sighed heavily, saying,

"May you find them sufficient."

"I do not fear. My duty lies clear before me; and, be the result of the struggle what it may, I must and will make it."

As I spoke these brave words, which grievously belied the sinking of my heart, my tears fell unheeded, almost unconsciously, and he continued:

"Florence! your heart misgives you."

"No, no; I am tired, that is all; I am not frightened."

"You well might be. It is no light thing that you have undertaken to do."

"Dreading it will not make it easier; it is not wise to encourage fears until they make one helpless."

"Not generally; although now it would be. Any thing would be wise to do now, which would arouse you to a sense of the needless misery into which you are rushing. Oh, Florence! are you right to persist in the course you seem bent upon? Is nothing due to others—to those who love you well, and who would sacrifice their own happiness to insure yours? Do their wishes or fears for you deserve no consideration? Or are you resolute to set every thing at naught—your own welfare, your friends' peace, and all that has hitherto been valuable to you? Oh, that I could show you what real poverty and struggles are!"

"It would avail nothing. I know they are terrible."

"Then how hateful both I and Abberly must be to you, when, in preference to either, you choose an alternative that you acknowledge to be terrible," said Mr. Spencer, bitterly.

"You are unkind and unjust to say so; but you do not mean it."

"I do! why else do you scorn all help and home from us?"

"I do not scorn either: I only repeat what I said once before, that while my family require my labor and I live to render it, I will work for them. I will never desert them at their need; *nor will I ever, to spare myself, burden another.*"

"Be it so!" he answered sorrowfully. "Your indomitable pride, Florence, over-masters both your strong sense and your natural kindness of heart; and you involve others in sorrow from which, under different circumstances, you would be the first to shield them. But I will say no more. I would not seem to force myself, or my mother's home, upon your acceptance. Both are yours to accept or reject; and having said this, I can say no more. While I live, I will serve you whenever you will let me; and while she lives, my mother's house will always have open doors for you."

The very same words Mr. Lyle had written! I trembled as I heard them. Twice had I been promised love and shelter, and I had refused to accept them. Was I right? Or was my firmness, indeed, as Mr. Spencer said, only obstinacy and pride? The future would show.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE next morning Mr. Spencer took leave, and, by my mother's desire, I wrote to my father immediately after; sending the letter through his agents.

A fortnight passed waiting for the reply; but none came, and I wrote again. To this last letter after another fortnight's delay, the following brief note was vouchsafed:

"DEAR FLORENCE—

"I have nothing now but my pay, and as that is not sufficient to cover my own expenses, it is impossible that I should be able to do any thing for you. I am very sorry for it, because I should like to make you all comfortable; however, it is a great satisfaction to know that with the education you and Helen have received, you will both be able to provide for yourselves.

"Whenever I can send you any money I will; but do not rely upon it, as unforeseen circumstances may often arise to prevent my doing as I wish. Be assured that I shall never forget you, nor neglect any opportunity of serving your interests; and with love to you all, believe me truly yours,
"G. SACKVILLE."

This epistle had neither address nor date; and, as the only post-mark it bore was a London one, it was alike impossible to discover the writer or reply to his letter. My mother's indignation upon reading it was extreme; while poor Helen wept and grieved so violently as to make herself really ill for several days.

During all this time my mother was wretched indeed; she never sorrowed for herself, her lost comforts, or changed position, nor yet for me; but for Helen she grieved unceasingly. The very idea of Helen being compelled to exertion and obliged to do daily work for daily bread, was terrible to her. Many times I feared lest her extreme distress should affect her health materially; seeing that, as it was, it confined her to her room, and often to her bed. Our funds, too, were nearly exhausted, and, as they diminished, her spirits sank lower and lower.

Three months after our arrival in London, our united purses scarcely furnished twenty pounds, and upon that sum we had to subsist for an indefinite time.

All sorts of vague and chimerical projects were suggested by Helen, not one of which was feasible; and, as their absurdity and impracticability were successively pointed out to her, she became indignant and willful, declaring that,

"Florence can't bear any thing that is not proposed by herself; she is so jealous."

And truly it seemed as if we were bent upon contradicting each other; for to nothing that I proposed would Helen agree. She would not hear of becoming a governess, or of giving lessons in music or dancing, in both of which accomplishments she excelled; nor of trying with me to open a school. If she might not do as she wished, she would do nothing.

In these altercations many valuable days passed, days precious for the work that might have been done in them; and at their end we were no nearer to a conclusion, than we had been at their commencement.

It was perfectly absurd for me to seek occupation as a governess, in the expectation of receiving sufficient remuneration to support Helen and my mother; and, although I soon obtained the promise of four pupils to learn drawing, I knew that from these I should not earn enough to afford us a bare subsistence.

We were speedily obliged to reduce our frugal expenses, by seeking cheaper lodgings; and we removed from the meagre-looking room in Brompton, to others more humble still in the Westminster-road.

Here an incident occurred, the day after our arrival, which afforded me great pleasure.

My mother and sister were out, and I was sitting sorrowfully in our scantily furnished bedroom, when the servant of the house entered, bringing a pair of shoes; it was her first appearance before me, and, making a low courtesy, she stopped at the door, saying, in the broadest Irish,

"Will you plase to have yer pumps in here, miss?"

I answered in the affirmative, and then directed her to perform some tidy work about the room, which was in a most neglected state. In doing this, she upset a basin of water on the toilet-table, and scattered its ornaments far and wide. Her dismay was excessive; what kind of punishment she was accustomed to for such misdemeanors I could not tell, but her gratitude to me for helping to put matters to rights, and promising not to ring for "the misthress," was almost ludicrous.

"An' sure, miss, dear, you've the ginerous heart; an' plase God! I'll not forget the good turn you've done me this day. I only came to this place a month a-gone, an' I'd have lost my carraothur intirely if you'd tould the misthress of me accidint."

"Have you been long from Ireland?" I asked.

"No, miss, only sin' my aunt, as I lived wid, died with the faver. An' please God, I'll soon be back agin among our people. Bad luck to me that iver I left them!"

While she was speaking, she seized upon my mother's dressing-case, and in the vehemence of her regret, rubbed it so heartily, that fearful of another accident, I exclaimed—

"Take care, my good girl; that dressing-case belongs to Mrs. Sackville, and—"

"Sackville!" cried the girl, staring at me

with open eyes and mouth; "did yer honor say Sackville?"

"Yes, that is my mother's name; did not you know it?"

"An' would ye be from Ireland?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, from Galway."

"An' the masther! Would he be a soldier?"

"Yes."

"The saints be praised this day! An' it's little I expected sich joy in this house—the blessing o' God be about it now an' iver! Oh, Miss Flory, dear! sure you're my aunt's Miss Flory."

"My name is Florence, certainly. But who are you? and who is your aunt?"

"Sure an' I'm Biddy Sullivan; an' me aunt was yer own nurse, Cicely O'Donovan."

"Cicely! Are you Cicely's niece? Oh! can it be true?" I cried, joyfully.

"Deed, miss, sorra word of a lie is there in it, at all, at all. An' wasn't it in hopes to meet wid the family that I came over?"

"And where is Cicely?"

"She's dead. The heavens be her bed this day! She died wid the faver last Christmas."

"Dear old Cicely!" I exclaimed, my eyes filling with tears at the memory of all her love and tenderness. "I wonder if she remembered me?"

"Is it remimbered yourself you mane, miss? Bekase if you do, you may be sure she niver forgot you while the life was in her poor worn-out body."

"Had she been ill long, then? How was it that she never sent to us?"

A long explanation followed this inquiry; from which I learned that, during the whole of her tedious and painful illness, the thoughts and anxieties of my poor old nurse had centred upon me; and that she had laid her dying commands upon her niece Biddy to come, after her death, to England, and offer her services to me and the "captin."

This injunction Biddy performed, to the best of her power. She came to England, and progressed as far as London; but there her finances failed, and she was obliged to "take service," as she said, "in a contimptible bit of a lodgin'-house, where the ghost of a raal lady niver came from year's ind to year's ind." Her wages were too small to allow her to save the most trifling sum, and she was beginning to relinquish all hope of being able to fulfill her aunt's command, when she so unexpectedly discovered me.

It would be difficult to say which of us was most gratified by the meeting. Biddy's delight was, perhaps, the loudest, but mine was assuredly as great; and it is certainly not too much, to acknowledge that I looked upon the introduction as one which promised to afford me real comfort and assistance.

Nor was I disappointed. Her shrewd Irish wit, quick common sense, and affectionate fidelity, were invaluable to me in many ways; and when our purse was exhausted, and it became needful to replenish it by the disposal of various articles of jewelry, Biddy transacted the business with secrecy and care.

Among the various projects for employing myself profitably which now incessantly occupied my thoughts, it occurred to me one day

that Mr. Edward Bellair had said, after reading a slight sketch which I had written in an album at Mowbray, that the author had considerable talent in composition, which, if cultivated, would be valuable. As "drowning men catch at straws," I found myself dwelling upon Mr. Bellair's chance-words, until I determined to try my fate with some magazine.

Without saying a word to any one, I wrote a short and doleful story, miserable enough to give its readers a violent fit of blue-devils, and dispatched it by Biddy to the weekly journal I had fixed upon.

The paper was published on a Saturday, and a board upon which the contents of each week were advertised, was always hung outside the office-door. Past this door I walked three successive Saturdays. My heart never appeared to beat from the instant I entered the street in which the periodical was published, until I stood before the board; then it leaped so furiously, that it seemed to threaten suffocation; and it was some seconds before my eyes were clear enough to read the announcement.

Three successive Saturdays, as I have said, I went into that street with a palpitating heart, and left it with a heavy and desponding one; but upon the fourth, I saw, in large letters, the first glimpse of which took my breath away with delight:

"BRIAN BOROHIME, AN IRISH TALE."

My story was accepted; and henceforth I was an authoress.

Visions of constant employment, pecuniary freedom, and literary reputation, floated before my eyes. I had no very distinct idea of how publishers paid; but I had a vague and misty imagination of large sums being given for small articles, and great homage being rendered to authors: simple fictions both, but, at that time, most devoutly believed to be realities.

Upon the following Tuesday, I sent Biddy with a note, and another paper to the editor. The first was answered by a check, for scarcely more than a quarter of what I had innocently expected; and the last, by the editor's compliments, saying, that he was already overstocked with articles of the same description, but would have pleasure in finding a place for "The Blarney Stone" in the course of a few weeks.

I was grievously disappointed; for I had suffered myself to hope and believe that in my pen I had found the means of supporting us all, and this discouragement was hard to bear.

Still I did not quite despair; nor give up trying. With a patient courage, at which I wonder now, it was so resolute, I sent six little sketches to as many different magazines. Of these, one was accepted, and *paid for*: one accepted, and *not paid for*; two were returned; one lost in the publisher's office; and, with respect to the other, the editor did not vouchsafe any tidings at all.

This would not do; that was a self-evident fact. Writing was not my *forte*; or, if it were, no one seemed disposed to place any faith in it; and we could not live upon *hope*.

It so happened that the rooms below those we occupied were tenanted by a lady who taught music; and she, hearing Helen's blithe voice *caroling above, managed to establish a speaking acquaintance with her.* Our fellow-lodger

had a fine-toned piano, and at last she invited Helen into her sitting-room to try it.

I have said that Helen was famous for talking, and, before many visits to Mrs. Chace and her piano, she had confided our whole history to her. The result of this was a conversation, which caused Helen one morning to rush upstairs into my bed-room, and exclaim—

"Oh, Flory! Mrs. Chace has hit upon such a capital plan for us! She wants you to go upon the stage!"

"Me!—the stage! Helen, you are certainly mad!"

"No, no! she has seen you several times, she says; and she thinks you would make an excellent actress."

"Indeed! I am sure I ought to be very much obliged to her."

"Now, Flory, don't be cross and dignified! Mrs. Chace says it is not at all difficult, and you will get a great deal of money; and it will be so nice, traveling about all over the country!"

"For those who like it, I dare say it might; but I do not: so pray, Helen, do not repeat any more of your friend's impertinences."

"But if you won't do this, what are we to do?—how are we to live?"

"I don't know: but certainly not by my turning actress."

"Why not, Florence? Mrs. Chace says it is a very pleasant life."

"So it may be: and, as you seem to like the plan so well, why do not you adopt it?"

"Me, Florence!" cried Helen, opening her large eyes to their utmost extent. "What do you think mamma would say?"

"I am sure I can not tell; much the same, I suppose, as she would to my doing so."

"Oh, no! Besides, I have not the taste for it."

"Nor have I."

"But, Flory," persevered Helen, "how are we to live else? Mrs. Chace says that, in time, you might earn twenty or thirty pounds a week. That's better than writing, is it not?"

"Yes, to those who have to spend the money," I said, bitterly; "scarcely to those who have to earn it."

"Perhaps not; though what you can see to object to, I can not conceive."

"Then why do you not do it yourself, Helen?" I asked, angrily. "Why, but because you shrink from the degradation? You know and feel that it would be hateful beyond all words to express, or money to compensate; and you shun it like a crime. Then how dare you urge such a life upon me? Am I less than you, or different from you, that I should do that which is too vile for you?"

"What strange ideas you have, Florence! You are the oddest girl I ever knew! I thought you always intended to do something for us all; and now you are as indignant at being told how you may obtain the most money, as if I had proposed something dreadful. You are quite incomprehensible."

"Does my refusing to become an actress make me so? Is it so very extraordinary that my feelings should rebel against a step which is too degrading to be even named as possible for you? Where is the difference between us, Helen, which makes you think to use me as a tool? Why do you, in my case, set at naught

the dignity, delicacy, and reserve, of which I have, at least, as great a share as yourself? Why is that to be right for me, which is the contrary for you?"

"Because we have been different all our lives; and because something must be done for poor mamma. I did not think you were too proud to help her, Florence."

I did not trust myself to speak, but left the room quickly. It was well that my pride lent me sufficient self-control to do so; for in my undisciplined state of mind and want of humility, I can not tell what rash things I might have said.

When I reached the sitting-room, where I hoped to find my mother, I started to see Mrs. Chace there, and alone.

My salutation would have rendered any tolerably sensitive person thoroughly uncomfortable; but it had no more effect upon this woman of the world, than if she and I had been nodding automatons.

"I have done myself the pleasure of calling upon your mamma, Miss Sackville," she said, "to offer her tickets for the Haymarket to-night. Ellen Tree plays 'Ion;' and as your sister says she has not seen her, I think you will be gratified."

"You are very good," I said, haughtily; "but my mother never goes to the theatre."

"Oh, but she will relax for once, in favor of Ellen Tree, and so classical a piece as 'Ion,'" returned the lady, with a winning smile; "at any rate, I will leave the tickets, and shall hope to see you at the Haymarket to-night. Your sister has set her heart upon it, I know; and I am sure your mamma could refuse her nothing, so fascinating and bewitching as she is!"

I made no reply, and the lady went on:

"And her voice, too; how very sweet and pure its tones are! but that seems to be a family inheritance. I have had the pleasure of hearing you sing frequently, and although your notes are not so true as your sister's, they are infinitely richer and fuller. You have paid great attention to your voice?"

"Scarcely any."

"Indeed!—then you have a great treasure yet unopened, Miss Sackville; two or three years' training under such a man as Welsh, or De Pinna, and you would do wonders. Your enunciation is so perfect, and your tones are so clear, that, either in speaking or singing, you might achieve any thing."

I was not gratified by this speech, as Mrs. Chace evidently expected that I should be; for the flattery was too gross; and she soon discerned that I was thoroughly impracticable. She therefore changed her ground; and after a little further conversation, said, in a sympathizing tone:

"You must be exceedingly lonely here, after the gay life to which you have been accustomed. It is distressing beyond expression to see the prospects of a sweet young creature like your sister so mournfully blighted. Your mamma, too: how sadly she has altered, even since she came here! You appear to be her only stay: every thing seems deferred to you; and it must be delightful to a mind like yours to find how truly you are appreciated."

There was a vulgar, pushing manner in this

lady which exasperated me beyond measure; yet I restrained the impulse which would have led me to say something desperately uncivil, and sat silent, and, so far, inoffensive.

My mother and Helen came in soon after, and, to my astonishment, the tickets were not only accepted, but the donor's offer of places in her conveyance to the theatre was accepted also. Mrs. Chace praised and flattered Helen, until my mother's usual good taste deserted her, and she could see no fault in the woman who so truly valued her darling.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN obedience to my mother's wish, and for the second time in my life that I had been to a theatre, I went with them to the Haymarket. And certainly, if Mrs. Chace's object in urging my visit, was to reconcile me in some sort to her proposal, she succeeded.

The exquisite acting and beautiful language, the classical dresses and scenery of "Ion," delighted me. I was so perfectly absorbed by the stage, that I had neither eyes nor senses for the world around me. For the time, and whenever Ellen Tree was before me, all outward things were forgotten, and instead of a beautiful fiction, "Ion,"—his loves and resolves, his aspirations and deeds—was a most vivid reality.

Mrs. Chace saw it, and as we returned home she said to my mother,

"Did you ever see so striking a likeness as that between Ellen Tree and Miss Sackville? I never could remember who it was that your daughter resembled so strongly, but to-night it struck me at once."

"Do you think so? Florence's features are scarcely so marked as Miss Tree's."

"Perhaps not; still the *tout ensemble* is similar. Miss Sackville might well pass for Ellen Tree's younger and fairer sister, and were they both in the same profession, I think it would soon be hard to say which of the two was the greatest favorite with the public. Miss Sackville's voice is far superior to Ellen's, so is her figure and style, and she only requires the hard work and good training Ellen has had, to compete with her successfully upon her own ground."

How poverty and fear for Helen's fate had changed my mother! A year before, such a speech as this would have been considered an insult, and the very *idea* of a grand-daughter of her father becoming an actress, looked upon as a sin; but now all was changed, and money, or that which would bring it, was the only thing thought of.

Three days after this visit to the theatre, during which interval my mother was greatly worked upon by Mrs. Chace's representation, she told me that our funds were nearly exhausted.

"And where the next money is to be procured," she said, "I have no idea, nor what is to become of us."

"I will sell those pearls which Mr. Lyle gave me, and while the money they bring lasts, Helen and I must try to do something; only keep up your spirits, mother and we shall do well yet."

"How, Florence? I confess I do not see."

"If you could only prevail upon Helen to give music lessons, I would strive to obtain a situation as governess; and only retaining as much of my salary as was absolutely necessary for my dress, the rest would come to you and Helen; so between us both we might manage to make you comfortable."

"Why, Florence," replied my mother, rather sarcastically, "how much do you suppose you would receive as a governess?"

"Perhaps fifty pounds!"

"Rather say twenty. Governesses are the worst paid and least valued people in existence. No, Florence, if that is your only scheme, I see very little chance of our being comfortable: besides, I question very much if Helen's health could bear the fatigue of teaching."

"She has never been ill, I think, mother."

"She never complains," was the reply.

"I am not nearly so great a proficient in music as she is, therefore I fear I should get but few pupils; though perhaps I might succeed in obtaining two or three more for drawing."

"And the proceeds? Scarcely more than you would require for your own wardrobe."

"Oh! I must learn to be economical. But do you not think, mother, that Helen and I might keep a school?"

"When and how could you furnish a house?"

"Oh! if you and Helen would consent, I think we might manage that easily. Mrs. Spencer or Mr. Lyde would lend the money."

"A strange loan, borrowed and lent without hope of repayment," answered my mother, contemptuously.

"Well, let it be a gift, then: we are not too proud to receive help, mother," I said, cheerfully, making a great effort to speak with proper temper and respect to the parent who, without proposing any better step than mine, negatived all my suggestions so positively. "I shall be most thankful for the help that would enable me to enter any respectable and promising way of life, by which I could assist you and Helen."

At this moment, Biddy entered with a note for my mother.

"Tickets for to-night for Drury-lane, from Mrs. Chace: she is very kind," said my mother, when she had read the billet.

"She is very officious, I think, mother; you used not to like such people."

"Nor should I chose her society now, but that she amuses Helen, and the use of her piano is very valuable to her. We are not in circumstances to reject such advantages; although I think you have taken an unreasonable prejudice to Mrs. Chace: she is much more liberal; for, although she can not but see how much you dislike her, she speaks of you in the handsomest terms, and would gladly serve you, if you would let her."

"She is very good," I said, proudly; "but I am not yet fallen so low as to require or endure her patronage; nor do you, mother, wish it, I am sure."

"My wishes appear to be of very little value in your estimation, Florence. Your unreasonable temper and pride have always been a great source of discomfort to me, as your poor grandparents prophesied they would be; but you scarce-

ly bear out his prediction otherwise. He imagined, that however unattractive your character might be in prosperity, yet that in adversity you would never fail me."

"And he was right, mother: I never will. Show me what your wishes are—treat me as you do Helen, and I will obey you faithfully."

"I think not, Florence: you have never cared for, nor sought my love as she has done; and even if I could give it at will, it would have little or no effect."

"Oh, mother, mother!" I cried, heart-stung, while the scalding tears filled my eyes, "do not be so unjust to me. Helen never cared for your love more than I have, nor half so much. As a child I pined for it, until I found that all hope to gain it, as she had done, was idle; and then I became hard and reckless. But although you have never cared to know or see it, I have loved you dearly; and now, so you will return it, and treat me as you do Helen, I promise to do all you may ask or wish. Oh, mother! do not make such a difference between your children."

"Really, Florence," replied my mother, "this is very unbecoming language. A stranger would think that I was a perfect tyrant. I am not aware that I ever treated you unjustly."

"No, not unjustly, perhaps; but unlovingly."

"I can not help that, Florence. For the measure of my love, if it has been scant, you must blame yourself: I give my affection in the proportion in which it is deserved. From childhood you have been jealous of Helen; and, although wanting her gentleness and amiability, you are still unreasonable enough to expect to receive the same love and regard."

What angel laid his palm-branch on my mouth, to silence the passionate words of indignant justification which rose to my lips? Surely some good spirit did; or in my angry sorrow I should have forgotten to be silent. The beautiful faith of the early church, which teaches us of holy guardian spirits given to us in baptism, is surely no mere theory, as rationalists would fain have it to be, but a real, blessed truth.

"Helen would do any thing on earth for me," were the closing words of my mother's conversation.

Moved by a feeling which was better than defiance, and yet not all the love and obedience it seemed, I went, immediately after the conference was over, to Mrs. Chace; and to her surprise, after a brief greeting, addressed her thus,

"Circumstances, upon which it is needless to dwell, have made it incumbent upon me to exert whatever abilities I have, in the most profitable manner. My sister informs me that you have expressed an opinion that I have some capabilities for the stage, and also that the profession is lucrative; may I ask if it is so?"

"Decidedly: I know of none so lucrative. You will require some training, no doubt, but less than most novices; while you have a positive advantage over all with whom I am acquainted at present, in figure, voice, and manner. I prophesy," she said, becoming elated at the prospect of her success, "that you will be a great favorite. Your face is so expressive, and your eyes—"

"I am glad to hear it," I answered, coldly; "in a matter of business, I am glad to hear that I have some capital. Like a horse, or a slave

it appears that the better an actress looks, the more she is worth. For the first time in my life, I thank God, heartily, that I am not a cripple."

The bitterness with which I spoke seemed to amaze my auditor, and she said,

"You will be delighted with the profession when once you have overcome the difficulties. There is something very fascinating in the applause of an audience."

"Yes; because the more of it you obtain, the more you are worth. This is a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence with me, Mrs. Chace, and I can only look upon it so. Pleasure or satisfaction of any kind from such a life as that of an actress, it is impossible for me to conceive; but if, by adopting it, I can accomplish what I wish, I will embrace it."

"Then you will of course take lessons."

"If it is necessary, certainly."

"Perhaps you know that I prepare pupils for the stage?"

Here was the secret of her anxiety and flatteries.

"I was not aware of it. I understood that you only taught music."

"Oh, yes: I have brought out several very popular actresses. Mrs. Merle, the operatic singer, you know, was a pupil of mine. But you, of course, will take the juvenile tragedy business?"

"What is that?"

"Desdemona, Cordelia, Juliet. But nowadays that line is generally taken in the country by the first lady, who plays genteel comedy as well—Rosalind, Lady Teazle, Beatrice, and such parts. You know them, of course."

"Indeed, I do not. I never saw three plays in my life, and never read half a dozen."

"Well, never mind, you will soon learn. Mr. Alston the tragedian drinks tea with me to-night. He shall hear you read, and then give us his opinion; in the mean time stay with me half an hour now, and you shall see a theatrical lesson given and taken. Miss Taylor, whom next to yourself I think the most promising aspirant in town, will be here directly, to read Ophelia with me and learn the music. She has about as much voice as a crow, and though she will play the part well, she will sing the snatches infamously: she has no more ear than voice either. I think you have both; I know you have one."

"Which?"

"The voice: the compass of your voice is very great. Suppose you run up the scale with me now. Now, sound that *Do*; open your mouth, and throw your shoulders back. Now take a deep breath—now, *Do*—Excellent. Now the octave. Very well, but a little out of tune. Now we will go up regularly."

The trial over, she said,

"Your voice is splendid. If your ear was as good, you might become in time one of the first English contraltos on the boards; but your ear is not correct: in sustaining a note you sometimes vary half a tone."

When I returned to our own rooms, I told my mother in a very few words upon what I had decided; asking as a mere matter of form, if what I was about to do, met with her approbation.

"Oh, yes, Flory, I am sure it does," cried

Helen. "Mamma has said all along that it was the best thing for us all; and Mrs. Chace says you are certain to succeed."

"Yes, Florence: and that is the only consideration which reconciles me to the step, necessary as it is. Success alone can make such a life endurable, either for you or us: but that will make it so, and I am sure you are too proud and ambitious not to aim at the greatest excellence it is possible to attain; therefore you have my full concurrence in your wishes."

No word of thanks; no word but cold permission to sacrifice myself, and strive hard that as little disgrace as might be, should attend upon it.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THAT evening I read Beatrice to Mr. Alston the tragedian, then some passages of Constance; and his satisfaction, though equal to Mrs. Chace's, was more carefully tempered and expressed.

The next day when I went into Mrs. Chace's room I found her absent; but sitting there was a lady, whose sweet, mild face attracted me instantly.

"Pray, do not let me send you away," she said, rising as she saw me about to retire; "I am waiting for Mrs. Chace, but if I am in your way I will call again. Pray, come in."

There was a tone in her winning voice which, more than the words, induced me to obey her; and in a few minutes we were pleasantly engaged in conversation. She was evidently puzzled about me, and tried by every well-bred manoeuvre to find out who and what I was, and what I was doing in Mrs. Chace's music-room. At last she hazarded the question.

"You are a pupil of Mrs. Chace's, I presume?"

"Not at present."

"She is very clever?"

"Yes, I fancy so; but I am a very incompetent judge, and I know no one who knows her. Still, I imagine and hope that she is."

The lady smiled somewhat sorrowfully.

"Pray, pardon the seeming impertinence of my inquiry, but are you about to study under Mrs. Chace for the stage?"

"Yes."

"Of course, it is by your own choice; yet I can not help feeling sorry for it. I fear that you will not find the world behind the curtain, as bright as that before, and that you will be disappointed."

"No, that will be impossible," I answered, "for I expect nothing. All that I find even tolerable, will be so much gain, for I anticipate little but ~~disgust~~ and labor."

"And yet you choose it?"

"Yes; as the Duke of Clarence chose the butt of malmsey wine. A way to die, that is all."

"Forgive me, for having pained you. I had no idea that any one selecting the profession you have done, was ever otherwise than fascinated by it at first."

"Can not you imagine a passenger on board a burning ship leaping into a stormy sea to avoid the certain death of fire, thus giving himself a

chance for life? You would not argue that he was fascinated with water, because he chose it as the alternative of fire?"

"No. But I do not see how such a case applies here."

"That is only because you do not know all the circumstances."

"Of course, of course; mine must necessarily be a very narrow view, since I know so little: still, if I might without impertinence, I would fain inquire further. Have you much interest among the magnates of the profession?"

"Not any. Except Mrs. Chace, whom I have seen some twenty times, and spoken to about half as often, I do not know one theatrical person."

"Then how do you propose to get on? Interest is quite as necessary to an actress's success as to a soldier's. The talent of Mrs. Siddons herself would not suffice, unless you had some influence with the managers."

"Indeed! I am very sorry for it, for I have not interest enough with any creature to procure the humblest possible employment."

As I said this, Mrs. Chace entered, and addressing the lady as Mrs. Lyndon, spoke to her in the most deferential manner.

"Thank you—presently," said Mrs. Lyndon courteously, interrupting some explanation upon which Mrs. Chace was about to enter. "First let me request you to introduce me to this young lady; that we may know each other by our proper names if we should ever meet again," she added, turning to me with her bland smile.

"With pleasure: Miss Sackville, Mrs. Hugh Lyndon."

In a few minutes I rose to take leave, and as I did so, Mrs. Lyndon rose too, and offering her hand, said,

"Good-morning, Miss Sackville, I have a strange fancy that you and I shall meet again ere long; if we do, I shall hope to find myself not forgotten."

"That would be impossible," answered I, cordially, for I was already fascinated by her gentle and friendly, although dignified manner.

The day after, I was sitting alone, when Biddy entered with a card: it was that of Mrs. Lyndon, who followed her closely.

"I have many apologies to make," she said, "for this unceremonious visit, but as I have an idea that I may be of use to you in your new career, I determined to come at once."

"You are very kind," was the only commonplace I could utter. She continued—

"Mrs. Chace told me yesterday, a great deal about you, which interested me exceedingly: although I am afraid I ought to confess, that I encouraged her loquacity more than was perhaps quite delicate; but I can honestly assure you that I was induced by a better feeling than curiosity. I had seen enough of you before she came in, to make me wish to know more, and serve you if I could; and happily I believe that I have the power."

Another similar commonplace. To strangers offering unexpected services of an uncertain value, what else but commonplaces can you say?

"I am not very experienced in matters of this kind, although latterly I have heard a great deal of them, but it seems to me that the first thing

necessary to be ascertained is, that you really have histrionic talent; the next, to find a person able and willing to bring it forward. And it is in both of these things that I hope to help you. The member for —, who is one of my oldest friends, has very great theatrical influence, and is universally considered to be a first-rate judge of embryo, as well as developed talent; and it is to him that I wish to introduce you. Now it so happens, that to-day he and the wife of the New York and Drury-lane manager, dine at my house, with one or two other friends; and I have come in this unceremonious manner to ask you to meet them. You will thus obtain a disinterested and competent opinion, and make a valuable friend. If Mr. Beauchamp pronounces a favorable verdict, Mrs. Cost will certainly procure you an engagement, and you will insure to yourself a fair and honest trial. Will you come?"

"Most thankfully."

"Then I will call for you at five o'clock, and drive you to York Terrace. In the mean time, read over some play, preparatory to doing the same this evening. I wish if I can, to get you an appearance and engagement without the aid of Mrs. Chace. It will be quicker, and I think more respectable: not that I would insinuate any thing against her perfect integrity, but that hers is not quite the school for a lady."

True to her promise, exactly at five o'clock, Mrs. Lyndon's carriage, herself the only occupant, called for me. In the course of the conversation which arose during our drive to the Regent's Park, I frankly told her my history.

"Poor girl, poor girl!" she said; "it is a hard and sorrowful fate: but I see no alternative. God, who opens this path before you, shutting out all others, will give you strength to walk in it. Remember his gracious promise, 'That as our day is, so our strength shall be.' Do right: do right, and fear not. He is sufficient."

This was new language: something I had not heard for years, except on Sundays, and at church; and it silenced me.

When we reached York Terrace, we stopped at one of the largest of those handsome houses which look upon the Park, and following my new friend up-stairs, entered a pretty boudoir.

"Now," said she, throwing open a door, "here is my dressing-room, and I am going to take strange liberties with you. You must look your best to-night, and must, therefore, resign yourself to the tender mercies of my incomparable Lucille. Your hair is not arranged becomingly, and you are pale as a ghost; both of these misfortunes she must remedy: the first by exercising her unrivaled taste, and the second by amusing you with a new novel while you lie down for half an hour's rest. You see to what a dangerous person you have given power over yourself; but it is useless to rebel: I am despot here."

When she left the room to dress, she said,

"Remember that you look your very best. You may meet an old friend, and it would not do to look ill."

Who could it be? I thought over every creature I knew, but upon no one could I fix as likely to be a friend of my hostess, whose name I had never heard until the previous day. At last, after many a vain endeavor, I relinquished the

task, and made up my mind to its being a pleasant jest of Mrs. Lyndon's.

I was, however, destined to experience a great and glad surprise; for, upon entering the drawing-room, who should come forward to meet me, but the cherished friend of my childhood, my loved and well-remembered governess.

"Miss Northey! my dear, dear Miss Northey!" I cried, clasping her hands, "how delighted I am!"

"Not more so than I am, Flory," she said, in the affectionate tones of old. "I assure you that I have been very impatient ever since I knew that you were coming. This has been a long day to me."

"Then you expected me, and this explains—"

"Why I took such a sudden interest in you?" said Mrs. Lyndon. "Exactly. I thought, the instant I entered Mrs. Chace's room yesterday, that I knew you; and when you spoke, my opinion was confirmed. I recognized at once the 'bonny Irish lassie,' whose portrait I had so often seen in my sister's desk, and about whom I had heard so much."

Here was another surprise. Miss Northey, Mrs. Lyndon's sister. In Ireland she had always passed for the eldest of her family, and now here was a sister at least ten years older. While I was pondering over this, the door flew open, and a fine boy ran in, and calling, "Look here, mamma!" seized Miss Northey's hand. Now I was quite bewildered.

"How perplexed you look, Flory!" said Miss Northey, laughing; "you do not seem to understand us at all, and frown as if you grudged me my sister and son. Go to your father, Hugh, and do not return until I send for you. First shake hands with this young lady; she is an old friend of mine. I taught her her lessons once, as I do yours now."

When he was gone, she said,

"I will not mystify you any more, Flory. I am (as I dare say you have conjectured by this time) Miss Northey no longer. Ten years ago I gave up that name for your friend Mrs. Lyndon's, by marrying her husband's brother. The boy you have just seen is my only child; and I am afraid I do not bring him up quite as wisely as I did you."

"No, I do not think Master Hugh will ever do your teaching as much credit as Miss Sackville does," said Mrs. Lyndon. "I have heard of you so often, Miss Sackville, that, even if I had not seen your portrait as a child, I think I should have known you to be Julia's old pupil as soon as I had any conversation with you. She has so often described your disposition and feelings, that when we talked so long yesterday, I could scarcely refrain from telling you that I knew you. And now, as I dare say you have each a great deal to talk about, I will make no apology for leaving you until dinner-time. Only remember what is to come after, and do not over-fatigue yourself, Miss Sackville;" and so, with a pleasant smile, she left us.

"Now, Flory," said my companion, when the door closed, "come here, and sit on this stool beside me, as you used to do years ago, and tell me all that has happened. Do you remember how fond you were of sitting on a stool and laying your head upon my knee, while I told you airy tales and smoothed your tangled wig? I

can scarcely fancy you are my little, wild enthusiastic pupil, you are grown so tall and calm; and yet you have the old smile, and—"

"The old heart too," I said, eagerly, through my rising tears. "I am calm, not because I feel less, but because I have learned to control my feelings more. One soon learns to shrink from showing feeling, when its very existence is disbelieved, and any involuntary betrayal is looked upon with suspicion and distrust. Do not doubt me, because I am calm. It is only as the ice over the rushing water."

"Never mind, mavourneen!" she said, "I do not doubt you: I never did, you know. To me you were always obedient, and loving, and generous; and if you were not always as demure as other children, I loved you better and forgot it. And now that I see the same smile, the same pleading tearful eyes—which always dimmed at loving words, as they flashed at angry ones—I need but the aid of very little fancy to imagine myself in Galway again, and that you are about to confide some heavy childish trouble to my discretion: some puzzle about the fairies, eh, Flory? Or, have you forgotten them since you have grown old and wise?"

"Try me with a new legend," I answered. "But I have heavier sorrows now than any fairy doubt could cause; and more than ever I did, in those childish days, I need your advice and guidance now."

"I fear so, indeed, Flory. I fear the dark days are, indeed, opening before you: but have courage, and do not shrink from them. Do your duty, Flory—do your duty, and remember who has said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' But now tell me all. My sister has only given me some stray hints, facts, and surmises, out of which I can make nothing; and I want to know all: how it happens that I find you in such altered circumstances, and what you intend to do. Tell me all."

And seated by her on a low ottoman, with my hand fast locked in hers, I did tell her all—my wishes, sorrows, hopes, and fears. Not one but found ready sympathy from her; and happier, notwithstanding all my trials, than I had been since childhood, I listened to her consoling voice.

After dinner, at which no one but her own family, Mrs. Cost, and Mr. Beauchamp were present, my hostess said,

"Now, Miss Sackville, will you read before Julia and me, or shall we go away?"

"Oh, stay; stay, by all means," I said.

"Yes, the larger the audience the better," cried the old gentleman, laughing. "You must get accustomed to the sight of strange faces, you know."

"What play will you have?" asked Mrs. Hugh Lyndon.

"Have you 'The Wife,' or, 'The Hunchback,' or, 'Romeo and Juliet,' there?" inquired Mr. Beauchamp.

"All."

"Then give her Shakspeare. Now do not be frightened, my dear young lady. You must try to fancy that you are alone; and if you can imagine yourself Juliet, so much the better."

In a voice which trembled from emotions of all kinds, I read the first few speeches of Juliet. I acquitted myself horribly, and I knew it; so did Mr. Beauchamp, for he said, encouragingly,

"Try Sheridan Knowles, Miss Sackville; try your countryman. Read this scene in 'The Wife.'"

I did so. It was one that I had been accustomed to read to Sir Hugh Danvers at Ingerdyne; and I was so perfect in every word, knew so well every point and emphasis, that I succeeded completely to Mr. Beauchamp's satisfaction.

"Admirable!" he said; "you'll do, my dear. Now let me see if you have any idea of acting. Mrs. Lyndon, will you stand up in that recess, and read these few lines of the Confessor's; just to give Miss Sackville the cue. Now Miss Sackville, let me hear if you can throw any passion into your voice and eyes."

"That will do, that will do," he said, when Mrs. Lyndon and I resumed our seats. "You are very nervous: but I think all the better of your ultimate success on that account. People who can't feel, will never make actors; and those who do feel, must be very long before they can face hundreds of gazers without tremor. Old play-goers will tell you that Miss O'Neil, even at the last, wept bitterly whenever she played Isabella or Jane Shore; and I myself have heard Mrs. Siddons sob unfeignedly. As far as my judgment goes, you have all the elements of success; but you want practice and a knowledge of stage business, both of which are essential, and both of which you ought to have, before you are brought to front a London audience."

"If she could procure an engagement in the country," said Mrs. Cost, "either on the Bath circuit, or at Cheltenham, or any place where the audiences are educated people, and where the stars go, she would obtain much valuable practice and instruction."

"Yes; if she really determines to adopt the profession, that is what must be done."

This was said half inquiringly, and I replied, "I have no alternative. I am obliged, and therefore determined."

"Well then, Mrs. Lyndon, if you will drive Miss Sackville down to my house the day after to-morrow, I will introduce her to Mr. Alston the—"

"I have already read to him at Mrs. Chace's."

"So much the better. Then he has had time to think about you, and what your chances are; and will be better prepared to give his opinion. Come, by all means; and let us hold a council upon the matter, and decide what it will be best to do."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. BEAUCHAMP was a bachelor of nearly eighty years of age. He was a person of a most beautiful disposition and mind, ever on the watch to do benevolent and kindly acts; and to his rare cheerfulness and sunny temper, might be attributed his unbroken health and never-failing spirits. With a heart as young as it had been in boyhood, he had ever-ready sympathy with youth; and nothing which could give them pleasure, or spare them pain, was ever forgotten or neglected by him.

On the appointed day I went with Mrs. Lyndon and my old governess to Mr. Beauchamp's;

Mr. Hugh Lyndon having promised to come as soon as the house was up, and escort us home. As soon as we arrived we were shown into a room in which there was no one to receive us; but we had not waited long when Mr. Beauchamp and Mr. Alston entered.

A formal introduction of the latter to my companions took place, but our host, mentioning my name as quickly as possible, and then inviting his other guests to admire a magnificent ~~urn~~ which he produced, led me away into a small room which opened, through folding doors of antique stained glass, from that in which we then stood, and said, in a subdued voice,

"My mind misgives me, Miss Sackville, that I am not doing a kind or wise thing in assisting your project of going upon the stage. I think that you have taken up the idea without due consideration, or knowledge of what you will have to bear, to forfeit, and to do?"

"Perhaps you are right," I replied. "I know very little, nothing in fact, of the minutiae of an actress's life; but it can scarcely be worse than my fancy paints it."

"Then why, in Heaven's name! do you rush upon it? It is all very well for persons whose vanity finds ample recompense in applause and admiration for all they lose; but for you, for any woman with a proud and delicate spirit, a gentle heart, or a due value for the estimation in which she is held by society, it is horrible: a slow, living death."

"I can not help it," I murmured.

"Why not, my good young lady, why not?"

"I can not."

"At least reflect well before you take any decisive step. Once put your foot upon the boards of a theatre, and that rubicon is passed, from which there is no return. Once breathe in the pestilential air of the foot-lamps, and a social degradation has commenced which can never be removed. Thenceforth you are an object for insolent familiarity, and a mark for ruinous calumny; you are your own no longer, but the property of an exacting, ungrateful, and suspicious public."

"I speak strongly, Miss Sackville, because I wish you to see the matter fairly and truly, divested of all false and glistening colors; and because I will not have upon my conscience, the sin of aiding to bring about the misery of a good young girl."

"You will find favor in the eyes of the managers, for your personal attractions; and in those very attractions you will find your danger and your enemy. It is women who scandalize their own sex, and they seldom or never forgive another for the desperate offense of having better looks and manners than their own. And such scandal as ladies talk, is hard to bear."

I sighed heavily, and said,

"You did not speak thus on Thursday: then you appeared to encourage me."

"Yes; because then I knew nothing of you: neither who nor what you were; and I spoke in a mere business spirit. I was asked to give an opinion of your probable success, and I did so: and nothing that I said then, I retract now. It is not that I have changed my opinion of your talent, but that I would fain dissuade you from employing it upon the stage. If you were a child of mine, I would say, starve on plain sew

ing, wear your life away in teaching charity children, do any thing, embrace any thing, rather than become an actress."

"And if it were possible, I would obey you, and gladly; but it is not. I have others dependent upon me, and I must—"

"Enough, enough, Miss Sackville! Forgive me for having gone so far; forgive me, if I have pained you. My intention was only to warn and ~~scare~~ you; but since that can not be in the way I ~~wish~~, I must be content with giving you all the little help I can, in your own way."

"Now we will return to our friends. First, however, let me beg you to be as cool and self-possessed as you are able, under the ordeal through which you are going to pass. Success in the eyes of the man before whom you are now to appear, may spare you a long and weary probation."

And, saying this, he took my hand as he would have done a child's and patting it, as if to reassure me, led me back to the library.

Othello was the play selected by Mr. Alston; who, after I had read several speeches, said:

"Will you try to go through the handkerchief scene with me? I can form a better opinion when I see what idea you have of acting. If you act Shakspeare half as well as you read him, I shall be satisfied."

When this was over, Mr. Alston said,

"Desdemona is not in your way, Miss Sackville, I see: she is too tame. You would play Emilia better."

I tried to smile, and asked,

"Well, sir, what do you think of me?"

"As I did the day I heard you read at Mrs. Chace's. You will play very well and very ill, just as you happen to enter into the spirit of your part. I should like to see you in Juliet, or Portia."

"Let me try Julia in the 'Hunchback,' or Mariana: I think I shall succeed better in either of those."

"Very well. I will be Master Walter. Do you know the part?"

"Yes. I have learned both that, and the 'Wife.'"

"Learned!" repeated Mr. Alston, with a smile; "you should say studied."

I had never seen either of these plays acted; but I liked their quaint and nervous language, as well as the characters of the heroines, and I acquitted myself satisfactorily.

"You shall hear from me very soon," said Mr. Alston, when he took leave. "I have an idea that I may speedily have an opportunity of being useful to you. Shall I address you at Mrs. Chace's?"

"If you please. I am residing in the same house with her."

By the evening post next day, I received the following note:

"DEAR MADAM—I am about to close an engagement with the manager of the — theatre, to play six nights during the ensuing fortnight. My consenting to do this lays him under an obligation, which entitles me to ask a favor in return; and if it is your own and your friends' wish to obtain an appearance, in order that you and they may judge of your theatrical talent, I shall be very happy to make Mr. Osborne's concession

to your wishes the stipulation I am entitled to demand.

"Let me hear from you to-morrow."

"Yours faithfully,

"T. ALSTON."

Under the advice of Mr. Beauchamp and Mrs. Hugh Lyndon, Mr. Alston's friendly offer was accepted, and the following Tuesday fortnight fixed for my *début*. I was to play Julia in the "Hunchback," and the first rehearsal was to be on the day week before the performance.

When all was settled, I felt most thoroughly miserable. While the business was incomplete, and questions of capacity or incapacity, appearance or refusal, the only pressing subjects of immediate anxiety, I thought and cared for little else. But when these were decided, and expectation had given way to certainty, my old disgust of the profession returned, and I was most wretched.

My mother saw this, and pitied me. She said nothing; but I knew by her watchfulness, and unusual kindness, that she felt for me, and this alone nerved me to go on in the course upon which I was entering.

Neglect or unkindness, a mocking word or a laugh incredulous of my suffering, would have driven me mad. Even as it was, I felt upon the very verge of insanity: I was so nervous, so excited, and so unhappy.

My dear old friend, Mrs. Lyndon, had left town to attend the sickbed of her husband's mother; and thus I lost, when I needed it most, the support of her kind and judicious encouragement and counsel.

Our money, too, was all gone: several times lately I had been obliged to have recourse to Biddy's good offices in disposing of various little articles of jewelry and plate. My dresses for Julia were, therefore, a matter of serious consideration.

Evening dresses I had plenty, but, of course, not one with the necessary train; and how to obtain them without funds, was a most perplexing affair. True, my pearls and the majority of my mother's ornaments yet remained; but as their produce, when sold, would be urgently needed for daily bread, they afforded no resource in this emergency. And now I, who never before had spent five minutes in thinking of dress, did nothing else but ponder upon it, morning, noon, and night.

I was, however, relieved from my dilemma, by the following note from Mrs. Lyndon:

"DEAR FLOXY—For the sake of our old love, I have promised myself the pleasure of attiring you for the ordeal of next Tuesday. I would certainly rather assist to deck you for some other pyre; but it can not be helped, and you will, I hope, go through the trial bravely, believing that it is your duty."

"As I can not be in town to assist in making up the dresses (I used to be considered very skillful in the dear old Galway days), I must beg you to order them according to the usual style, and of the most becoming materials."

"I have not forgotten the ribbons you used to buy with your own little pocket money, for 'poor dear Miss Northey,' and as you had your way then, so I must claim to have mine now."

"Do not confine the purchases you make to the amount of the inclosed note, but provide yourself handsomely; and if you love me as you used to promise that you always would, do for yourself as you know I would do for you, if I were by your side.

"My poor mother-in-law is still in great danger. Let me hear from you as soon as possible after Tuesday: before, I know you will have no time to write.

"With my sincerest love, and prayers for your protection in the new career now opening before you, believe me, dear Flory,

"Yours affectionately,
"JULIA LYNDON."

Inclosed was a check upon Coutts for thirty pounds.

Thus liberally provided, I went immediately to Miss Scotland, the well-known theatrical artiste, and submitted myself to her measurement and taste for the necessary dresses; making only one stipulation, which was, that they should be as little trimmed as possible.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AFTER one such week of mental torture as nearly rendered me unfit for the work which was to succeed it, the day for my first rehearsal arrived.

I did not sleep all the previous night, and when morning came, I was weary and feverish; my eyes ached and burned, and my lips were parched and dry. I trembled in every limb, and although faint and hungry could not eat; sal volatile and camphor julep were upon my table, and I swallowed large doses, vainly hoping so to quiet and stimulate my sinking frame.

Ten o'clock was the hour fixed for rehearsal, when Mr. Alston had promised to meet me at the theatre, and introduce me to the manager. He advised me to come alone, or simply to bring a servant: he thought, and wisely, that I should be better without sympathy in all my little difficulties.

Our lodgings were not far from the theatre, and I knew that if I left them a few minutes before ten o'clock, I should have plenty of time to reach my destination; yet every sound made me start from my chair, fearing that I was too late. I would thankfully have put off the hour until my death-day, and yet I shuddered with fear lest I should lose it.

Breakfast was laid for me, and with kind and pressing words my mother urged me to take it; but faint as I was, I could not have eaten an atom. I tried twice, but the effort nearly choked me, and my mother saw that it was impossible. The half-hour past nine chimed from the clock upon the stairs, then the next quarter, and with a desperate effort I rose to go. Biddy was to be my escort, and now she stood beside me.

"The car's at the doore, Miss Flory, dear. Don't be cast down: remember, 'tis always the darkest hour before day, and come with a bould heart. Throuble's a fleet horse, and sorra a one as iver outrun him; but he's a rale coward too, an' always shows his heels to them as fronts him."

And, with a force which had nothing of the

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familiarity or impertinence which most English servants would have shown upon such an occasion, Biddy led me as passively as if I had been an infant, and placed me in the coach.

A very short time sufficed to take us to the stage door of the theatre, and when we reached it, I summoned all the courage I could muster, and pushing it back on its heavy springs, passed into the dingy entrance.

Oh! what a wretched place it looked: so dirty, dark, and damp. The sunbeams, so brilliant outside, could scarcely struggle in, and even when they did, they only served to make the horrors of the place more apparent. The very air seemed foul and plague-laden; I sickened as I breathed it.

A man, as dirty and repulsive as his den, was sitting before a long kind of desk, reading a newspaper. Nailed upon the wall above him, were pieces of tape, into which were stuck notes and letters, of all colors, shapes, and sizes: bills and billets-doux, MSS. never destined to be read, and letters begging for orders, were all mixed together in strange confusion.

The door-keeper raised his head as I entered, and, observing Mr. Alston's directions, I presented his card, and asked if he had arrived.

"No; he won't be here yet," said the man, looking at a grim-faced clock over the chimney-piece. "'The Hunchback' isn't called till half-past ten, and he's sure not to come before the time, though he may half an hour after."

While I stood waiting, several people, "ladies and gentlemen," as the Cerberus called them—came in, asked a passing question or two, looked for and took their letters, stared at me, and then disappeared through a door behind the door-keeper. Last of all came a lady superbly dressed, and carrying a little dog in her arms.

"Any letters for me, Edgar?" she asked, in a mincing voice.

"Yes. Here's three pink 'uns, and this thick white 'un; and here's too bookets as the gentlemen left theirselves, nothing else."

And from the interior of the desk, the man brought forth two magnificent bouquets of hot-house flowers. How fair they seemed in that foul place; it seemed almost like sacrilege to bring their pure, sweet blossoms there.

"You know who that is, I s'pose?" asked the man when the lady had disappeared.

I answered in the negative.

"Well to be sure! I thought as every man, woman, and child, on the boards knowed her. Why that's Mrs. Hurry. She's starrin' here a bit; and the letters and bookets, as comes for her is unknown. She's quarreled with Lord Chesterton, and I should think there's a matter of five or six gent's carriages here every night after the farces, for her to choose from—"

"May we not go up-stairs?" I asked, hastily, anxious to escape the necessity of listening to the history that I saw was coming.

"Who d'ye want?"

"Mr. Alston, or the manager: I am here by appointment."

"Oh, you're the new lady as is to play Julia next week?"

"Yes."

"Oh, yes! you may go; but that young woman must stay here. 'No admittance except on business,' you know," said he with a laugh.

This arrangement did not please me at all; so after trying in vain to soften his determination, I took half a crown from my purse, and by virtue of that little bribe obtained permission for Biddy to accompany me.

The door through which we had seen so many persons disappear, now opened for us, disclosing a long dark passage, the floor of which inclined upward very considerably, and across which were nailed, at short intervals, pieces of wood to enable men and animals to keep a safe footing.

A company of wonderful horses had just been performing at the theatre, and as this was their only way of entrance and exit, the cleanliness of the place, which seemed as if it had never been cared for since its erection, was not improved. Long habit might, and did, make people familiar enough with this ladder-like passage, to run up and down it boldly; but when Biddy and I first essayed to mount, I felt very much as if I were clambering up the sides of a house, instead of entering in the usual convenient manner.

It would be difficult to describe the world of darkness and confusion into which, when an upper door was gained, I entered. Of course I had never been behind the scenes of a theatre before, and had no very clear idea of what it was like; but, vague as my notions were, and fully prepared as I was for a great difference between the gay bright illusion upon which the audience looked, and the foul smoky caldron in which it was concocted, still, any thing like the reality I had never imagined.

Before me, when the door had closed with a dull jar, lay a most bewildering country. To my left was a dingy wall, against which leaned a medley of huge and strange lumber, while on the right, standing in grooves, and towering upward to a great height, with spaces of about a yard and a half between each group, stood clustered together, what looked like gigantic packs of cards. Above, the daylight forced its way through some dirty windows which were almost wholly obscured by the "flies," pendent clouds, and machinery.

Above, below, turn which way you would, there was that horrid, sickening, suffocating smell which is inseparable from a theatre. It may seem ridiculous, but to me that smell is always connected with the idea of moral degradation. From her Majesty's Opera House in the Haymarket, to the Victoria in Lambeth, all theatres breathe out the same disgusting and unwholy air. Matter-of-fact and literal people will say that every place lighted with gas, where numberless jets are being turned off and on at all hours, smells the same; and it may be so; but to me—and I am only writing of myself—that foul, pestilential atmosphere seems redolent of vice and immorality.

This bad air, inhaled for the first time, came to me from all quarters; and, more than any thing I saw or heard, disgusted and sickened me.

The place seemed deserted by every visible living thing, yet sounds of laughter issued forth from the darkness; and tired of staring into obscurity, I tried to make my way toward them.

I took a wrong turn however, and found myself in a large square room, lighted by a window nearly at the ceiling, and furnished only with a gaudy sofa, half a dozen rickety chairs with smart fringed petticoats of yellow chintz, and a

pier-glass and a table. Over the chimney-piece a long and shallow glass-case was fixed, containing, on slips of paper, casts of pieces to be performed during the week, and the day's "call for rehearsals."

While I stood half unconsciously contemplating this forlorn and tawdry place, a man entered whistling. He took no notice of me, except to stare, but with his hands in his pockets walked to the fire-place, and read down the "casts," whistling as he did so. This over, he turned round, and after looking at me for a few seconds, said,

"Are you in this here new farce?"

I controlled the contemptuous impulse which urged me to remain silent, and answered "No," as civilly as I could.

"Come to read it then, p'raps?"

"No," again. He was not at all abashed—I learned afterward that actors never are—and persevered with his investigation.

"Been on the boards long?"

Another "No."

"Thought so: what's your line?"

Not having the least idea of what he meant, of course I could not answer him: for which I was not sorry; as I thought, and not unreasonably, that a dead silence would be, even to him, a sufficiently broad hint, that I was not inclined for his conversation. But in this I was disappointed. He wanted to know who and what I was, and until he had found that out, it was out of the power of any hint, such as a peaceably disposed person could give him to obtain silence.

"Got scent, I s'pose, of the row last night between the governor and Miss Vinley. My eyes! what a pair they are! always at it, hammer and tongs. But I think this will be a settler; she's so uncommon cool over it. Women always mean mischief when they hold their tongues—it's so unnatural."

If so, I thought, what a mischievous creature I must appear just now!

"Well, I wish you luck, I'm sure. By Jove! we want some pretty gals badly enough: we're out-and-out the ugliest company in London."

This was quite too much, and turning quickly round I left the room. Darkness, escaping gas, and the chance of breaking my limbs among the stray properties, being all preferable to this man's society.

As I left the room, a dirty urchin, apparently about eight years old, judging from his size, but with the face of a man of thirty, came to the door and looked round; he then called in a shrill voice,

"Every body for the first scene."

I heard the same mysterious words issuing from various quarters after the boy had disappeared, and I conjectured that he was gathering the company together. Nor was I wrong; for voices came in answer from all sorts of places, and in every variety of tone and language. For a long time I wandered about, until at length, led by the sound of voices and laughter, I found my way to the stage.

A rickety table and chair stood near the stage-box on the "prompt side;" at which, with a few ragged books and papers before him, sat the prompter. Beside him was the ubiquitous boy I had seen before; and opposite, moving about the stage, were three or four shabbily dressed

people, idly reading some indistinct words from papers which they held in their hands; the only distinguishable phrases being the last line of each speech. Some did not even exert themselves so much as this, but went through the "business" in perfect silence, only uttering the last three or four words: this they called "coming to cues."

In the wings were congregated groups of ill-dressed, well-dressed, shabby and splendid people, talking and laughing—regardless of the prompter's continued—

"Sh! sh! silence, ladies and gentlemen, if you please."

Behind the prompter, and evidently discussing the capabilities of the stage, were the stage and acting managers; and, bearing an active share in the debate, was a scene painter; who, dressed in a loose blouse and forage cap, looked in perfect keeping with the place.

No one noticed me, and my patience was thoroughly exhausted, when after a time I heard the swing of a distant door, and in a few minutes saw Mr. Alston approaching.

"I have a thousand apologies to make," he said; "but my delay has been unavoidable. I was obliged to attend the reading of a new tragedy at the Haymarket, and have only just escaped. How long have you been here?"

"About two hours, I think."

"Did you not receive my note?"

"No. What note?"

"One that I sent to you last night, apprising you of the change of time for to-day's rehearsal."

"No. Otherwise I should not have been here so long. One would not intentionally increase the hours of attendance in this place."

"So you think and feel; every one does not agree with you: but *chacun à son gout*, you know. And now, to release you as speedily as possible, will you come across the stage with me, and let me introduce you to the manager? I will then try and get our rehearsal called immediately."

CHAPTER XL.

ALL eyes were turned upon us, as we crossed the stage higher up, and went over to what I afterward learnt was the O. P. side. I trembled so much that I could scarcely walk steadily, when after the introduction, Mr. Osborne (the manager) said,

"Would it not be better to go through Julia's scenes at once, Mr. Alston? There will be no necessity to rehearse the whole piece until play day: every body has played in it before."

Mr. Alston agreed; and the rehearsal which had been going on so long being just over, Mr. Osborne said,

"Call 'The Hunchback,' Mr. McNaughten, if you please. Helen, Sir Thomas, and Modus: Master Walter and Julia are here."

"Helen—Miss Clifford!" shouted the call boy.

"Here!" cried a little pale flippant woman of about forty, coming forward from a group who were filling up one entire entrance, and speaking with an ironical laugh. "You mean us to be perfect, Mr. McNaughten, seeing that we have none of us seen the play before."

"It will be a novelty if you are," murmured the prompter.

"Clear the stage! Clear the stage!" cried the same functionary in a loud voice.

"And the wings, too, if you please, Mr. McNaughten," said Mr. Alston. "A first rehearsal is a very nervous thing."

"Julia—Helen!" was now called.

"Is your book marked with the entrances?" asked the prompter.

"No."

"Then I'll do it for you after rehearsal. Now you come on after Helen: third entrance O. P."

I stared. What was O. P.?

Helen laughed,

"You're quite a novice, I see," she said.—

"It's something new to find a lady who is going to play Julia not know the entrance: isn't it, McNaughten?"

This very amiable speech disconcerted me not a little. I was so nervous and dispirited that the most trifling things affected me, and I felt my color come and go like a child's. However, I was told by Mr. Alston that O. P. meant "opposite prompter," and that, as that individual sits, during the performance, in a kind of sentry-box upon the left side of the stage, the instructions I had received simply indicated that I was to follow Helen, from the third open space on the right-hand side of the stage.

This I accordingly did. In tones as much like those of a parrot as can well be conceived, Helen raced through the first speech. How I got through mine, I don't know: I think it was in a whisper.

"Come nearer the centre, Julia," said the prompter.

"Turn more to the front," said the stage manager.

"Speak louder," said Mr. Alston.

I did all three, and the next direction was,

"Cross."

Another puzzle; and when it was explained by Helen passing behind me with a laugh, I felt that I walked as if my knees were tied together.

Although painfully conscious of the unfavorable impression I was making upon the manager, and the wretched inferiority of my performance, yet the knowledge that for my life I could do no better then, and that to others I was appearing the dunce I felt myself to be, only rendered me more miserable, and less capable of exertion.

For the first two scenes this wretched sensation continued; but as the second concluded, I found myself becoming so utterly nervous and helpless, that I felt if I did not make a desperate effort to rally, I should either sink upon the boards, or burst into tears.

I saw Mr. Alston's look of disappointment, and the shrug of the manager's shoulders, as he turned away to talk to some one in a dark corner of the stage; I saw Helen's contemptuous smile, and heard the audible expression of her pity addressed to Clifford; and a sudden revulsion took place in my feelings: pride came to my aid, and by a powerful exertion of will, I determined to conquer myself—to hear nothing but the words to which I was to reply, to see nothing but the face to which I was speaking, and, if possible, to think of nothing but what I was doing.

Thus resolved, I went on for the scene with

Clifford, in which he renounces Julia. Listlessly, almost sleepily, Helen followed me; but the tones of my voice startled her, as they certainly did me, and she stared, thoroughly awakened.

Mr. Alston, Mr. Osborne, and the stage manager were standing together by the prompter, talking to him; but as I went on speaking, they stopped and looked inquisitively at me.

My heart beat fast. I dared not look at them, nor pause to think; for I felt that it would deprive me of all self-command, and that any check now would be a fatal one. It was fortunate for me, too, that in this scene I had so much to do and say, so little time for listening or inaction: the energy once roused was kept in constant requisition, and this saved me. When the rehearsal was over, I received the warm congratulations of Mr. Osborne and Mr. Alston. "Only don't speak so fast," said the former. "Even with your voice, while you talk so rapidly, you can not always be understood; and nothing offends an audience more than either a hurried or a drawing voice."

I bowed, and treasured up the advice, common sense telling me that it was valuable; shook hands with the manager, and went home.

On reaching it, I walked heavily and slowly up-stairs into my own room. I did not think; and scarcely felt that I was awake. Had I been touched by a torpedo, my faculties could not have been more completely benumbed: they were as worthless as if I had been deprived of them. I did not suffer half the pain that afterward ensued; but was to the full as miserable. A heavy stupefying sense of misery oppressed me, and I had not nerve to shake it off.

Two more rehearsals, and the play-day came.

Mr. Beauchamp, Mr. Lyndon, and Mrs. Cost had each sent handsome checks for their boxes, and had used their influence to obtain a full and friendly house; while the manager, thus propitiated through his purse, was as courteous and bland as a manager could be.

Mrs. Chace volunteered to accompany me to the theatre, to dress and remain with me during the evening; and every thing, but my own courage promised well.

All that day, faint and weary as I was, I took nothing but ether, sal volatile, and cold water; so that when night came, I was feverish and weak. I had read and re-read the play-book, until my memory appeared gone; and I began to have a dread of forgetting all I had to say.

"Never fear, never fear," said Mrs. Chace; "it will all come back to you at night: keep yourself quiet, and do not think about it." Admirable advice, needing only one thing to make it useful—practicability.

The evening sun was gilding even the smoky London world, and brightening the dusty streets, when I again entered the stage door, and became suddenly engulfed in darkness and the sickening effluvia of gas.

Girls with band-boxes, men with parcels, women with jugs half covered, and people with nothing at all, stood talking and waiting, and rushing in and out of that lobby, until, in the clamor and confusion, I almost forgot how to escape from it, making matters ten times worse by giving way to every body who pushed past me, at last I found myself separated from Mrs. Chace, and standing alone upon the first step of

the inclined passage. Before I reached the top, however, my companion joined me; having by her invincible coolness and readiness, succeeded in making her way easily through the crowd.

Mr. Alston had stipulated with the manager that I should have a private dressing-room; but when we reached the door we not only found it locked, but that the woman intrusted with the key was absent, no one knew where.

Biddy too, who had been dispatched with the milliner's basket, containing my dresses and all the necessary materials for stage adornment, was missing also. We were beginning to fear that, either there would be no Julia, or that Julia must appear in a walking costume; when the "ladies' dresser" came up, and informed us that Biddy, having found the door of the room appointed to me locked, had conveyed herself and her treasures into the general dressing-room, and had there secured "a comfortable end" of the long table.

Thither then we went, up a wide dirty staircase lighted by a miserable gas-burner, which only served to make the wretched place look more deplorable still. A door was exactly opposite to us when we reached the top, and right and left ran a broad passage, one side of which was protected from what looked like an abyss, only by a strong rough railing.

The ladies' dressing-room was on a level with that upper world called "the flies," from whose exalted regions descend the vapory clouds in which theatrical fairies love to float down to this lower earth. Men and boys were busy in this passage, fixing ropes and shaking out "skies" and borders; for there was to be a new ballet after the play, and they were getting the machinery in order. I narrowly escaped being pushed through the railing by one of these impatient *avant-couriers* of genii, and was very glad when our conductress opened the dressing-room door, and introduced me saying,

"The new Julia, ladies."

The room into which, thus announced, I entered, was long and lofty. Opposite the door was a huge fire-place, and on each side, nearly at the ceiling, were three windows well curtained with dust and cobwebs. Hanging from the centre was a large gas-light, and along the walls of the room, and down the middle, ran long narrow dressers. Upon these last were drawn, at intervals of about a yard and a half apart, bold chalk lines marking the separate territory of each "lady"; and upon every space so marked, invariably stood either an entire or broken looking-glass: in most cases a candlestick with a tallow candle, ready to be lighted, and an irregular heap of something covered by a dirty towel or toilet cover.

Late in the evening the room became full to suffocation; but when I entered it was only occupied by Biddy and three other females. These were Miss Clifford—the Helen of the night; a woman nursing Miss Clifford's baby—Miss Clifford being in reality Mrs. Roberts, the low comedian's wife—and a young girl who was to be a fairy in the ballet, but was at present dressing to be my attendant in the play. They all stared inquisitively at me, except Miss Clifford; she nodded, at the same time calling to the fairy and whispering, evidently about me and who I

was, for the sylph replied, glancing under her bonnet to where I stood,

"Oh, indeed! I thought it must be: nothing particular."

"Oh, dear no," replied Helen; "very far from it."

Just as I sank down upon the hard dressing-stool, to submit my head to the will of Mrs. Chace, a sharp rap echoed on the door, and a shrill voice cried,

"Overture, ladies!"

Mrs. Chace laughed at my bewildered start, and inquiring glance.

"They have just 'rung in the orchestra,' my dear, that's all, and come to give you notice, that you may lose no time. The call-boy will come again presently."

At last I was dressed, my hair twisted into a knot of ringlets behind, and my beautiful soft India muslin train adjusted to a nicety. Mrs. Chace surveyed and approved the whole; and as she pulled the skirt tightly down from the waist, to insure the bodice falling into its rich rounded folds, she said, with an air of intense satisfaction,

"Well, certainly, there is nobody in London who can make a dress like Fanny Scotland. She is a perfect artiste: she has so much taste and judgment, and studies a figure so thoroughly. It is really worth while to be in the profession, if it were only to have one's dresses made by Fanny."

As she said this, the same sharp knock which had so startled me before, struck upon the door again, and the same voice cried,

"Five minutes, ladies!"

"Just ready in time," cried Mrs. Chace: "that announcement means, my dear, that in five minutes more they will ring up the curtain; now drink this *sal volatile*, and come down into the green-room. Don't be nervous: there's nothing to fear."

As we entered the room into which I had wandered upon my first visit to the theatre, we met Mr. Alston, who exclaimed,

"That's right! I'm glad to see you ready. Come with me down to the wing, and you'll get used to the lights and noise before you go on. Come, keep up your courage: after the first plunge, you will find the rest is nothing. Above all things, remember to speak plainly, and don't look off at the wings. Nobody has a right to stand there: but they do; and the faces behind always harass a novice more than those in front. Come, 'My pupil—daughter!' come."

The curtain was up when we reached the wing, and scarcely a minute after, I missed Master Walter from my side, and heard the loud reception which greeted his appearance.

"You had better go on the other side," said the prompter, kindly; "you can cross behind this scene, and you will be ready without hurrying yourself. Call Helen."

I did as he advised, and went with Mrs. Chace to the O. P. side. I was very faint, and trembled in every limb. My teeth jarred against each other, and I shivered as if I were standing in an east wind.

Mrs. Chace was sensible and kind. She did not scold or laugh at me, as so many under similar circumstances would have done; she did not pity me, and so make me worse; but she was

silent: only putting in a cheering word now and then, and telling me in confident words and tones, that in five minutes the worst would be over, and I should be as calm as ever.

A shrill whistle, which I did not understand, a scraping noise—as two carpenters answered it by pulling back on each side the scene upon the canvas back of which we had been looking—and in a moment, not knowing well how or why, I was on the stage.

CHAPTER XLI.

A MASS of lights and faces, a tremendous noise of clapping hands, and a sensation that I was courtseying, is all that I remember for the first few minutes. That I spoke was certain, because I heard the buzz of Helen's voice in answer, though unable to distinguish any thing that she said, and I crossed mechanically at the right time and place, seeing her do so: but I walked and moved as in a dream: having no more power over myself, and knowing no more what I was doing—so far as exercising thought and judgment went—than one of Madame Tussaud's wax figures.

At last the scene was over; all its duties having been gone through in the same apathetic, nerveless, dreamy way.

When the scene-drop fell after the second act, Mr. Beauchamp and a lady wrapped in a large opera-cloak, and holding closely to her face the fur which enveloped her throat so that none could have recognized her, came to me where I sat. They led me to a remote part of the stage, and Mrs. Hugh Lyndon (for it was she) taking both my hands, looked pityingly in my face, and said,

"My poor girl, you must give this up. I came to scold you: but it would be cruel to add to what you are already suffering, by a single word. You must give it up."

"Why? Have I made so complete a failure?" I asked, in a faint whisper.

"Yes, and no," interrupted Mr. Beauchamp. "No one in front can hear a word you say. It is all dumb show; not ungraceful, certainly, but very unsatisfactory."

"I must do better," I said, languidly.

"You can not. I fear we have mistaken your talents completely; and you have gone through this public and painful ordeal for no purpose."

"I am afraid so, indeed," said Mrs. Lyndon.

Mrs. Chace, who had missed me from the green-room, now came up, and, bowing to my companions, said,

"I wish you could infuse a little more courage into Miss Sackville, Mrs. Lyndon: she only requires nerve to do very well, and without it she will ruin her reputation and future prospects. A decided failure upon a first appearance can never be overcome."

"I am greatly disappointed," murmured Mr. Beauchamp, as if to himself. "I never was so mistaken in my life."

"I must try," I said.

"It is in vain: you have not the power, my dear. You read very well—beautifully—in a room; but on the stage you are terribly at a loss. I can't think how we could all have been so infatuated," exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp.

tones of great though suppressed annoyance; and with, as I thought, the slightest possible tinge of contempt.

I murmured something about endeavoring; but he said quickly,

"You've done your best, my dear; I know you have: every body must see and acknowledge it; only, unfortunately, it is a 'best' which will not do for the public. It is a most unhappy mistake. Success is the only thing that can make this profession endurable; without it, it is detestable."

The manner in which this was spoken stung me more than the words, and a resolve, made up of half sorrow, half defiance, took possession of me. I would neither be so contemptuously pitied, nor so coolly condemned. I *would* succeed.

The chagrin of a defeat, the blight of prospects I had forfeited so much to brighten, my mother's ruined hopes, all rushed upon me at once; and forgetting, in their greater magnitude, the terrors and languor I had so weakly suffered to unnerve and subdue me, I roused myself to such a height of indignation against my own cowardice and other people's pity, that when I went on for the scene with Master Walter, in which Julia signs the title-deeds, I was as self-possessed (although my heart beat wildly) as if I had played the part a hundred times, and was now rehearsing it alone.

An English audience is generally good-natured and patient; willing, except in rare instances, to encourage the timid, and judge mercifully of a novice. I found them so that night. No sooner did they perceive that I was anxious to exert myself, than they afforded me every encouragement, and gave me every token of good-will. While I, finding that they were pleased, and looked upon me with kindness, threw off the thrall of fear, and giving myself up to the excitement of the moment, went on with an *abandon* which would have astonished me far more than any body else, if I had given myself time, or calmness, to think.

My only rest was now upon the stage. When off it, I paced up and down behind the scenes with a restless, anxious step; heeding no one, thinking of no one: I was in a state of wild, impetuous excitement. The stage—the stage—to be on the stage, before those blazing lights, doing, acting, striving—any thing but to be still, waiting, and alone.

Mrs. Chace did not talk to me; she saw that my nerves were too tightly strung to be under my own power of control, and knew that while the tension lasted I should go on boldly; but that, if they gave way while at their present painful stretch, the reaction and depression would be extreme. Thoughtfully and kindly, therefore, she let me alone.

The curtain fell amidst thunders of applause. The instant it reached the ground, I turned mechanically away, and had reached the foot of the stairs, my way to which I had to make through that worst of all abominations—a rush of gentlemen behind the scenes, when Sir Thomas Clifford hurried after me, exclaiming,

"You must go on again, Julia. They will have you."

"No, no," I said, mounting the steps; "I can not; indeed, I can not. I am exhausted."

"But you must.—Hark!"

And truly the din was horrible. Whoops, whistles, cat-calls, yells, stamping of feet, knocking of sticks, mingled with clapping of hands and cries of "Julia!" combined to make a most terrible confusion. I had no time to listen to it, however; for Mr. Osborne came rushing up, crying,

"Where's Julia? where's Julia? You must go on, my dear (every body is 'my dear' in theatrical phraseology). Where's Mr. Alston to lead her on? Go to his dressing-room, and beg him to come here. Don't be frightened: you've done wonders. It will all be over in a minute. Just pop on at the O.-P. door, advance a few paces, smile and courtesy, pick up the bouquets, look unutterable things, and then glide off again—that's all."

And with this unwelcome, unmeaning, and most absurd ceremony, my performance for that night ended.

When I was changing my dress, a penciled note from Mrs. Lyndon was brought to me:

"You have achieved a most unexpected success: but to-night you ought not to undergo any further excitement; therefore, I shall say no more than that I heartily congratulate you. My carriage is at the stage door to take you home; whither I entreat you to go without seeing or speaking to any one. I shall be with you early in the morning."

"Ever yours,
"G. L."

I obeyed this note to the very letter, and in a quarter of an hour from its receipt, was at home. Faint, weary, and ill, I threw myself upon the sofa, hoping to sleep. But in vain: every time my eyes closed, I was acting over and over again the scenes I had just left; starting up at the fancied summons of the call-boy, and answering to imaginary cues. The stimulants, too, which I had taken during the day, now only served to increase the evil; making me feverishly drowsy, (though without power to sleep) and wretchedly nervous. I was not delirious; but as bewildered and irrational as delirium could have made me.

In this way, alone in my own room—for with much difficulty I had prevailed upon my mother to leave me—the night was spent. As morning dawned I fell asleep, overpowered at last by the narcotic effects of the stimulant, against which I had been struggling all day, and did not wake until noon.

After a dilatory toilet, upon descending to the sitting-room, I found Mrs. Lyndon and Mr. Beauchamp with my mother: Mr. Alston having only just then left them.

"He came," said Mr. Beauchamp, after a few kind words of congratulation, "with an offer; which, although he consented to bring it, he thinks with me, that it would be unwise to accept."

"What is it?"

"To make an engagement with Mr. Osborne for the remaining six weeks of his season. He will give you in return two-thirds of one night's clear receipts, with the prospect of a permanent engagement after this is concluded, if you are successful. What do you think of it?"

"That it will not do: not on account of the terms, for those I don't very well understand; but because, if I am to look to ultimate success

in London, as the reward of all my toils, it is very clear that London must not be the school in which I learn. It is not reasonable to expect that people will ever consider me as any thing above mediocrity, when, as long as they can remember me, I have been studying my lessons before their eyes."

"That is exactly my view of the case," said Mr. Beauchamp. "My opinion is, that you should eschew London most carefully, and make every effort for a country engagement; in which you will play every thing, and so acquire the ease and stage experience which are essential to success, and which can not be gained except by practice."

"What does Mr. Alston say?" I asked.

"Precisely as we do; you have made a favorable impression upon the London public, and he thinks it would be most unwise to endanger it."

"Then that question is settled. The next and the one least easily answered is, how am I to get this country engagement?"

"Either by application to one of the many theatrical agents who abound in Bow-street, and that respectable neighborhood; or through some of the people who saw you last night. There were two or three country managers in the house: I saw both the Bath and York men in the green room."

"What could take them there?"

"Yourself. A first appearance is a matter of importance to all the managers; country ones especially. Somehow or other, they contrive to know the antecedents of every person who puts his or her foot upon the boards; and they as often decide upon the wisdom of making engagements from that knowledge, as from any evidence of talent."

"Beautiful and characterless women stand (I am sorry to say) the best chance with a London director; but with a countryman it is very different: next to talent, character is with him of paramount importance. In country towns, where every body and thing is known, it is essential that a proper regard to appearances should be preserved, and beautiful wickedness stands almost as bad a chance in the country, as ugly stupidity does in London. And this, not because people are one bit better in the country than the town; but because they are more known, live more before each other's eyes, and are obliged to 'assume a virtue, if they have it not.'"

"The truth and bearing of all this duly considered, I think that after a few inquiries (which would be made last night) as to your friends, wardrobe, expectations, &c., you have a very fair chance of receiving a note to-day from some agent or other, who will have been instructed to write, by one of the country managers, and who will offer his services to procure you an engagement upon the usual terms."

"Won't the man call or write himself?"

"Oh, no; that would be too straightforward: managers don't do business in that way. Like many other bargainers, it is their policy to underate and affect to despise the man or thing they all the time desire to have; lest the unfortunate tyro should think too much of himself, and venture to ask his real value."

"Amiable!"

"But true, nevertheless. Take care what you do when you make your first engagement."

"The very idea terrifies me: I am certain to do, or leave undone, the very thing I ought not."

"Well, if you will trust me to be present when you sign and seal, I may perhaps be useful to you. At any rate neither agent, nor manager will be so likely to attempt to take advantage of your inexperience, as if you were left to their mercy alone."

"And now, if your mamma can spare you, you can not do better than get into Mrs. Lyndon's carriage, and let her drive you four or five miles out on the Blackheath road for change of air. You look pale and weary, as if you had been up all night, and were not half awake."

"My head aches strangely," I said; "there is a dull heavy pain at the back of it, which I never felt before; and my eyes ache at the light: I think the air will do me good."

"Then put on a light bonnet, and we will drive very slowly for a few miles. You shall not talk, but go to sleep, if you feel inclined," said Mrs. Lyndon.

I rose to obey her; but as I did so my brain reeled, and, without a word, I tottered and fell.

CHAPTER XLII.

THAT night was the first of a brain fever which confined me to my bed for weeks, and to the house for months. For many days after I was first attacked, I lay, insensible to all outward things, upon the mattress to which I had been carried.

My first recollection is of awaking in the twilight of a hot summer evening, and finding myself alone, but so weak, that on attempting to raise my hands to remove what felt like a weight from my forehead, I was utterly unable to do so. The pillow upon which my head rested, was hard and wet, and there was a sickening smell of ether in the room. For a moment I tried to think, and remember what had happened, but the effort was too great; my temples throbbed painfully, my eyelids fell heavily, and I became again insensible.

Night with her solemn and quiet gloom had replaced twilight, when I next awoke; and became conscious of low voices speaking near me. My mother's was the only one I recognized, and it was subdued and tremulous. I had no clear conception of what the words meant, but by some instinct I knew that they applied to me. They were these:

"I will not deceive you, madam. The danger is great, and as imminent as you fear. For although within the last few hours there is some slight improvement, still I dare not hold out much hope. The crisis will, as I believe, take place to-night; if she passes it favorably—that is, if she awakes relieved, free from delirium and fever, all may go well; but if not, I have little hope.—It is strange," continued the same speaker, thoughtfully, after a pause, "that you should have no idea of the cause of this attack. Nothing but most severe and protracted mental suffering can have occasioned it; and it seems scarcely possible that so young a lady can have so deep a sorrow unknown to her family."

"I have not the most remote idea," said

mother. "She has always seemed to suffer less from our late reverses, than any one else in the family; and although at first she certainly disliked the profession she has embraced, yet ultimately she adopted it of her own free will; and having done so, has since appeared not only reconciled, but satisfied with it."

"It is very strange," repeated the voice. "I think you said before, that there is no attachment in the case?"

"Certainly: none that I am aware of. My daughter is not a girl likely to fall in love."

"So I imagine, from what I have heard you say before: well, it is all very strange."

These words passed, as it were, through my brain, without the exercise on my part of a single faculty. Without intending to listen, I heard: without reflecting, I understood. I could not have been quite conscious, for they left no impression; neither alarm, anger, nor sorrow. I forgot them as soon as they were spoken, and it was not until many weeks after that I recollected them.

Days and weeks followed this, and, although conscious of people coming to my bedside and speaking to me, I knew no more. One minute after any occurrence, I could not have recalled it. Faces that I knew, came round and spoke to me; but although they were familiar, I could not have named them: the continuous effort of thought needful to do so, would have thrown me into new agonies of pain; and that which I already suffered was excessive.

At last, little by little, I began to improve, and recognize people and things. My mother's care of me was unwearied; but Helen I seldom saw from week's end to week's end: nor did I regret it, for she was so thoughtless and unquiet, that a visit from her invariably threw me back for several days.

It is a wretched state, that vague dreamy perplexity which succeeds a long illness. The constant striving to remember, to exert one's faculties and powers, to do as one used to do before; and the perpetual and imperative check which meets all our efforts and wishes, combine to render the condition of a slowly-recovering invalid, one of the most distressing that can be imagined.

The only fact of which for a considerable time I was thoroughly conscious, was the perpetual gloom which hung over my mother. Never for one single moment did she neglect or forget me, or the comforts which Dr. Belford prescribed; but although she was always on the alert to minister to my wants, she never smiled or seemed at ease. Whatever question I asked, she either silenced or evaded; and as my intellects gathered strength, I saw that she was pondering and grieving over the future.

It is wonderful how poverty quickens the perceptions, and often aids us more than care or medicine in our struggle against illness. How the knowledge that we can't afford to be ill, helps us to shake it off. A rich man, smitten with the hand of disease, lies passive, resigned, sorrowful, and quiescent; but a poor one feels that he must be up and doing: like the rush in the fable, he bends submissively to the storm with which he can not wrestle; and when it has passed, instead of yielding to exhaustion, or "trusting to time," rallies all his powers of mind and body, and struggles manfully with

his foe. And thus it was in my case; for no sooner did returning intellect enable me to divine the cause of the gloom upon my mother's brow, than I exerted every nerve to second the efforts of my physician, and regain my strength, in order to be useful to her.

(Although not by nature cowardly at pain, I am thoroughly so at debility.) Nothing is to me so terrible as weakness: no paroxysm of suffering, however intense, subdues my courage like it; as poor people say, "it daunts one;" making me thoroughly unhappy.

During my onward progress to health, I felt this grievously. Often and often I wept, despondingly, when, upon essaying to perform for myself some slight service, I found that I was compelled to desist from utter incapability of exertion; and dissatisfied with my lagging progress to convalescence, began at last to fancy that recovery was hopeless.

Still, with all the little energy of body and mind at my command, I battled with this feeling; and soon found, as most will who make the trial sincerely, that the resolution to get well did more toward effecting my recovery than all the foreign aid which I received, great and skillful as it was.

Summer and autumn came and went, however, before I left the sofa; and even then, when winter was some weeks old, I could not walk without assistance.

All this time, Mrs. Chace was most kind and attentive; sharing my mother's watch over me with great patience and friendliness. Pert, officious, and disagreeable as she had seemed to me in days of prosperity and health, in sickness and sorrow she was cheerful, willing, and thoughtful; ever ready to do what she could, and to offer and urge her services.

Two serious misfortunes had befallen me while I lay insensible, the full amount of which it was not long before I realized. These were, the sudden death of my kind and valued friend, Mr. Beauchamp, and the dangerous illness of Mrs. Hugh Lyndon; to facilitate her recovery from which, she had been ordered to winter in Italy; whither my beloved friend, her sister-in-law had accompanied her.

All this I learned by degrees. They were afraid to tell me such heavy news at once, and so broke it to me little by little: a most unwise plan to follow in any case, but especially so in mine, and with people of a similar temperament. To us one heavy blow, in which all is told, is easier to bear than a succession of lesser ones, coming at uncertain intervals.

There is a great relief to minds of a certain calibre, in knowing the worst, and at once. All their strength is roused to meet it, and it generally proves sufficient for the need. When fully convinced that the worst is told, that nothing lies behind, every energy is brought to bear upon it; but when tidings of sorrow come piecemeal, doled out to us, as it were, by well-meaning but injudicious friends, "now a bit, and then a bit," it is impossible to rally: because one is never at ease; never certain that this grief, when conquered, is the last on the list. And in such a case, to imaginative minds, the indefinite too often becomes the infinite.

The death of Mr. Beauchamp was to me a most serious misfortune; for with him had ex-

pired all my theatrical interest. Mr. Alston, Mr. Osborne, and the whole theatrical clique, having, of course, only exerted themselves in my favor as the protégée of so popular and influential a man as the member for ——. The uncertain length of Mrs. Hugh Lyndon's absence, too, added considerably to my difficulties; for, although when I first had decided upon adopting the stage as a profession, I had neither known her nor Mr. Beauchamp, yet, having done so before my first appearance, and being indebted solely to them for it, I had learned to rely upon them so implicitly, that now I felt helpless and desolate.

During my convalescence—in fact, from the day I was first able to think rationally—I had lost no opportunity of studying; so that, when I recovered, I was perfect in the words of many parts.

Only once I alluded to the subject before my mother; it was when she said, with an involuntary sigh, that our circumstances and prospects were now melancholy indeed, since it was evident that I could not continue to pursue the theatrical profession.

"And why not mother, dear?" I asked cheerfully; "because of my shaven crown? If that's all, so long as there are wigs and frontlets to be bought at every hairdresser's shop in this good city of London, that need be no impediment; and I know of no other: do you?"

"Yes; your own dislike."

"Nay, mother, I have bid good-by to such luxuries as likes and dislikes long ago; and really, if I could insure from the stage sufficient remuneration to provide the necessary means we require for existence, it would be very little more hateful to me than any other way of earning a living: in some things, perhaps, rather less so."

My mother's countenance brightened as I spoke, and she replied, earnestly,

"I am glad to hear you say this, Florence. I was afraid that your mind was set firmly against it, and I can see nothing else which promises to be so lucrative."

"Nor I; and, therefore, you need never apprehend that I shall change my mind. I am become intensely mercenary."

"That is the last thing you will ever become, Florence," exclaimed my mother, cordially, with a certain tremulousness of voice, as she turned away.

I can not tell how it was, whether it arose from my utter dependence upon her and the proneness of human nature to love the thing it cherishes, but there existed at this time a better understanding between my mother and myself than we had ever enjoyed before; and the natural consequence was, that instead of looking forward to the life of trial and sacrifice which lay before me, with the unmitigated disgust I had always hitherto experienced when thinking of it, I began to view it in the more pleasant light of a means by which I might express to my mother, the gratitude with which her kindness during my illness had inspired me.

And it was well that I did so; for just at this time I was shown the following terrible letter from my father, which had been wisely and kindly withheld from me until I recovered; and which if I had not been strongly nerved by the

memory of my mother's kindness, would have caused me to falter in my duty, if not wholly to abandon it:

"By a strange chance I have received intelligence of your late most disgraceful adventure. At first I could scarcely bring myself to credit that even you and your mother, reckless as your proceedings have always been, and lost as you are to all sense of the dignity of your family, could have been guilty of so monstrous an act; but the authority upon whose report I speak, is of too high a character to suffer me to doubt his information.

"The most charitable way of accounting for such willful and flagrant degradation, is to suppose that you are insane; but as even this will not be accepted as an excuse by the world, I lay my commands upon you instantly, and forever, to abandon the life you have chosen, and to leave London, the scene of your disgrace, immediately. If you do not at once obey me, I shall take means to compel you, since I will never permit my name to be dishonored by your audacious folly.

"But under any circumstances, or any amount of humiliation and contrition, I desire you to understand, that I shall never recognize you again. I will never acknowledge for my daughter a girl who has disgraced her name as you have done. No extremes of fortune—brought on by your own extravagance—in which you may have been placed, will ever justify or atone to me for the course you have taken. With the education I gave you, at a time when I could ill afford it, you might surely have gained a decent and creditable living; under a different appellation, have screened your family from the degradation of having it known that one member of it was reduced to work for hire. But as you have thought fit to pursue an opposite course, you can not be surprised at my resolution to discard you utterly. I sincerely hope that I may hear of you no more.

"GERALD SACKVILLE."

To these most cruel and undeserved threats and reproaches, there was as usual no address, no date. I could not even guess whence the letter came, nor, had I been ever so much inclined, have answered it; so, after the first bitter pangs of mortification and sorrow, I laid it by and strove to forget it.

For scarcely more than a moment did it make me falter in the resolution I had formed, or doubt whether I was right: I felt, I knew that I was; and when the first shock was past, I determined to go on.

Sometimes a wandering thought pointing to Mr. Lyle, who, if he knew my difficulties would surely relieve them, came stealing to my heart; but the memory of his strongly expressed resolve to do nothing for my mother or Helen, discouraged and chilled me, and effectually precluded my seeking help or emancipation from him. To no one else could I look. Mr. Comberton was dead, and his family dispersed; the Vaughtons were abroad, I knew not where; the Spencers, upon whom alone I could rely, I could not apply to; and dear Mrs. Lyndon, when we first talked upon the subject, had said:

"Detesting this profession as you do, ~~Florence~~

you may think it strange that I do not seek to dissuade you from it. But it has always been my habit never to throw obstacles in the way of any enterprise or path of life, unless I were prepared to offer help to a better; and this I am not able to do in your case. Were you alone, you know how gladly and gratefully I would offer you a home; but with your mother and sister what can I do? they are so thoroughly helpless and *erigeante*, that it would be impossible to provide for them out of the very small means at my disposal. Therefore, I think, that to help you in the painful but necessary career upon which you have entered, will be the wisest and most effectual way of rendering you assistance; especially as I have none of the fears for you which those who know you less, may very fairly have: a good and virtuous woman sanctifies any life, however much it may be at variance with the world's received opinions.

"Do not mistake me, and think that under ordinary circumstances, I would advocate any departure from the acknowledged habits and usages of society; they are generally right, founded upon reason and experience, and should therefore be respected; but there are cases, and yours is one, when a slavish obedience to arbitrary rules would involve a plain neglect of duty. If it were optional with you to choose between the stage and any other profession offering equal advantages, then I would urge you by every means in my power to take the other course; but it does not: you have no choice; and until you have, it is no part of a friend's duty to add to your difficulties by dissuading you from following the path of obedience."

Thus were all my friends disposed of: from none could I look for sufficient aid to enable me to maintain my family, without embracing this hateful profession. I was now in the same strait in which I had found myself once before, on that sad night when I had visited my father in London, in the hope that Ingerdyne might be rescued. But now, I had not Mr. Lyle to fly to in my distress.

CHAPTER XLIII.

My protracted illness, and the loss and absence of friends who would have served me, had indeed reduced us to a dilemma from which it was now become imperatively necessary that I should make a strenuous effort to extricate us all. And as strength ~~stuffed~~, I became more and more impatient of inaction, and anxious to exert myself.

But the avenues to advancement in the career I had marked out for myself, seemed to be now closed. My successful *début* had probably been forgotten, and other *débutantes* filled the places that were then open for me. Instead of being sought, as I might have been at first, when my success was fresh in public recollection, I had now to seek; perhaps to undergo the mortification of reminding those to whom I applied of my very existence, and of the grounds upon which I rested my claims to an engagement.

It was, therefore, welcome news to me, when, a few days after I had read my father's heartless letter, Mrs. Chace came into the room, saying,

"I have just had a visit from Mr. Mountain; you remember him? The stage-manager of the —. He has taken the Cheltenham theatre, and is forming his company. Would you like to take an engagement with him? He wants a leading lady."

My heart misgave me, but only for a moment, and I replied,

"Yes, if I am competent; but do you think I am? I may play a first class part in one or two plays, but regularly I am sure I should not be equal to it."

"Well, perhaps just now it would be too much for you; still you wouldn't like to take the walking-lady business?"

"What is it?"

"Oh, a very good line in a large company, but in a small one, a little of every thing—good, bad, and indifferent. At Cheltenham, I should think it would do better for you than the leading business; as your great object must be to get practice."

"What would the walking lady (what a name!) play in this?" I asked, taking up "The Wife."

"Nothing at all; unless the manager wished to make a 'strong bill' by bringing in the best of his company, then she would play Floribel."

"What! the waiting-maid?"

"Yes; that woman with the one long speech."

"Well, certainly, that's very easy; if that's a specimen of a walking-lady's work, it is not very fatiguing."

"Not in that case, but her parts are often both troublesome and unprofitable; frequently twenty 'lengths,' which will not gain a hand."

"Under such circumstances, then, she has as much to do as any body else; the only difference being that it is not of so much importance. Well, I should rather like that."

"At first you might; but after a time, you, like every one else, would be dissatisfied unless you played the best business."

"Why?"

"First, because it pays better; secondly, because, as you become more used to the boards, you would be ambitious of occupying a prominent position upon them."

"The first is certainly a very cogent reason; the soundness of the second I doubt exceedingly."

"'Bide a wee, and ye'll see,' as the old song says. But now, when would you like to have a little conversation with Mr. Mountain?"

"Whenever he chooses; perhaps, though, he may not be desirous of the honor."

"Yes he is; for he called upon me expressly on your account; he wanted to find you out."

"Indeed! Well that is very gratifying to my vanity. I thought by this time that my brief theatrical existence had been forgotten."

"So it is; by every one except agents, managers, and critics; and their memories are elastic; they remember and forget at will."

"They are not singular, I think; most other people nowadays do the same. I suppose that I may consider myself fortunate that Mr. Mountain's memory has not collapsed so far as to conceal me altogether."

"Indeed, you may; he is not by any means a Quixote of friendship, I assure you; although I dare say he will try to make you believe so."

"Is he liberal and straightforward?"

"Hem!—when it suits his purpose."

"Why, so is every body; but is he worse or better than most?"

"About the average of theatrical men. He is a curious combination of opposite qualities; lavish and mean, improvident and parsimonious, shrewd and short-sighted; honorable out of business, bent upon taking advantage in. Altogether a character full of contradictions; but an admirable type of his class."

"Which, to judge from your sketch, is not the most attractive."

"No; but where in this working-day world, will you find one much better, on the whole? It is scarcely fair to judge a man apart from his temptations; and those of a life on the boards are peculiar and trying."

"I fear so."

"You may be sure so; and none know *how* trying, but those who have experienced them. There is vice of deeper dye, and virtue of a purer quality on the stage, than is to be found in any other occupation of life: vice that is extreme and hideous; virtue which is almost sublime. And pray remember, that, if a man is to be considered brave in proportion to the might of the enemy he conquers, the integrity which is proof against the moral malaria of a theatre must be of the very highest order."

"I grant it. I wish the world would do the same."

"So they do, in the abstract. It is only when their opinion can be of value in single individual cases, that they refuse to believe. They admit the position generally, as they can not very well help doing, and because it involves nothing; they deny it when individualized, because then it involves the contradiction of their pet theory, that there is no virtue on the stage. I look to you to be a very valuable champion to the cause."

"Me!"

"Yes; you have talent, tact, energy and free-will; an unblemished name, and the pride to keep it so. You must champion the cause of those, who, with equal integrity, have less courage and ability to assert it, you must do battle with the world in their behalf; and if you work with the single and glorious purpose of winning right, for those who suffer wrong, you are sure to achieve a victory."

"You are quite enthusiastic," I said, smiling: "it is not often that you indulge in these 'Meg Merrilies' dreams about right and might."

"No," she answered, with a sigh; "I have lived long enough to see their folly. Might in this world always conquers right."

"Always?"

"Yes: at least, forty-nine times out of fifty."

"Well, let us come to business. What do you advise me to do with respect to Mr. Mountain?"

"Accept any reasonable offer that he makes."

"So I think. Will you, then, be so good as to settle that for me? I am so ignorant in these matters, that I shall not know what is right for me to ask, or him to yield."

In answer to a note from Mrs. Chace, Mr. Mountain called upon her that evening; and, with very little difficulty, an engagement on my behalf was entered into. His theatre was to *open in a fortnight*, and I agreed to be in *Cheltenham two days previously*, in order to attend the rehearsal.

My salary was to be very, very small; so small, that, taking the expense of wardrobe and traveling into account, I feared that I should not be able to live; but Mrs. Chace assured me that my benefit would amply compensate for it, and that I should realize on that occasion quite sufficient to meet my mother's expenses in London.

Thus assured, and turning resolutely away from the feeling of disgust with which I looked upon the life now opening in real earnest before me, I proceeded at once to make all needful arrangements. To my great surprise I found that my pearls were still in their case, and that my mother had nearly twenty pounds in her purse.

"Why, mother," said I, laughing, "contrary to the usual custom, my illness seems to have made us rich. Some fairy must surely have nestled in that green web, for love of its color, and set up a tiny mint; take care the coins are not elf-gold, and vanish upon payment. Nineteen sovereigns! How in the world did you come by such riches?"

"Has not mamma told you?" cried Helen.

"No."

"Then let me tell the story. Oh, mamma, let me enlighten Flory."

"With pleasure, if you can; but if you have no more to tell her than I know, I am afraid she will not be much wiser for your information."

"Never mind; if she is stupid, I can not help it, you know; but I rather hope that, as she is half a fairy child herself, she may be able to read the riddle to us. First and foremost, mamma, give me the letter, that I may produce it in the right place."

"Now, Flory, you must know that one evening, a week after you were taken ill, and while you were at the very worst, a gentleman and lady, who would give no name, called to see you. I was out with Mrs. Chace, mamma was sitting by you, and as they would not allow her to be disturbed, they requested permission to come in and write a note. To this (as she was in a very amiable mood), Biddy consented, and showed them into Mrs. Chace's room, where she left them. In a few minutes afterward the bell was rung, and when she answered it, she found the lady wiping the tears from her eyes, and the gentleman with a letter in his hand; which, with a sovereign, he gave to Biddy, desiring her to deliver the epistle to mamma, and keep the coin for herself. While she stood courtesying and wondering, the mysterious pair vanished, whether into air or through the door, she can not say—and then she ran to mamma and delivered their missive; out of which, when mamma opened it, fell a little packet of bank-notes and gold, amounting altogether to sixty pounds."

"Impossible, Helen! you must be dreaming: who were they?"

"Ah, that is the mystery. Here is the letter: do you recognize the handwriting? Stay, though, let me read it to you first."

"A lady, an old and sincere friend of Miss Sackville's, to whom the altered circumstances in which her family is now placed, are well known, begs permission to inclose the contents of her purse for use in the present emergency, and implores Mrs. Sackville to allow no scruple of delicacy to prevent her employing this trifling sum in her daughter's service."

"Mrs. Sackville is earnestly requested to pardon the unceremonious manner in which this attempt to serve her is made, in consideration of the circumstance, that the lady who takes the liberty of doing so, is on her way to Italy, and, not being able to see Miss Sackville, is compelled to adopt this course."

"A few words addressed Mrs. S——, Poste Restante, Rome, with tidings of Miss Sackville's health from time to time, will tend considerably to reconcile the writer of this note to her absence from England, during the illness of so dear a friend."

"Well, Flory," said Helen, when she had finished, "who is this dear friend? Unless it's some of those fairy people you are so fond of, I can not imagine."

"Let me see the letter. No, I do not know the hand: it seems to me to be disguised. Was there no seal?"

"Yes; a crest, the device a hooded falcon, with the motto 'My time will come.' Why, Flory, how you blush! Do you know who it is?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Oh, who? Tell me."

"I would rather not, unless my mother desires it particularly."

"But she does. I knew she does: she detests mysteries. Come Flory."

"I am not sure; and I would very much rather say nothing about it."

"Do as you like, Florence," said my mother; "of course, I should prefer knowing who the lady is; because, as Helen says, I dislike mysteries: but please yourself."

"Thank you, mother. I am not at all sure; I only suspect. The seal is not a crest, merely a fancy; and similar ones may be in the possession of fifty people."

"Very likely."

"Oh, mamma, it is not at all likely. I am sure that the impression upon the seal of that letter was a crest. It was the shape of a shield, and the motto was in a garter. I can not imagine why Florence makes any mystery about it."

"I do not wish to make any mystery, Helen; I would only rather say nothing about it: and as my mother allows me to use my own discretion, I shall do so."

"Oh, certainly!" said she, pettishly, "pray please yourself: only I must say that the whole affair looks very strange. I wonder mamma does not insist upon an explanation: I thought she hated mysteries."

"So I do, Helen."

"Yet you encourage Florence in making one. If it had been me, you would not have given me the power of choice."

"Under the same circumstances I should, Helen; but since you think differently, and that I show an undue preference, I must request Florence to say whom she believes to be the writer."

"Do you really desire it, mother? Pray remember that I know nothing; I have merely a suspicion."

"I perfectly understand; still, after what has passed, I do wish you to tell me whom you imagine to be the writer of that letter."

"The seal is one I have often seen upon Mrs. Spencer's watch chain. I know no more."

"Mrs. Spencer!" exclaimed Helen, in a tone

of disappointment; "why that is no mystery at all. I thought—I fancied—"

"What, Helen?" I interrupted, angrily. "What did you fancy? That I had formed some acquaintance of which my mother would not approve, and that it was now to be discovered? Was that your thought?"

"Well, why did you make such a mystery about it, then? Why did you try to keep it a secret? What necessity was there for all this concealment? It certainly looked very odd."

"I am sorry you thought so," I said, proudly; "I did not imagine my integrity held so low a place in the estimation of any one, and to my fancy there is far less that is odd in the anonymous gift, than in your suspicion."

I was deeply mortified by this discovery. The very idea of receiving pecuniary aid from a man whose hand I had so perseveringly rejected was humiliating in the extreme; and during the first moments of vexation and pride, I made the most rash and angry resolves.

This was in the evening, though, when we are always more elate or desponding than at any other time. When day came, with its stern practical realities, the service assumed a different shape; and I was thankful for the help which had been administered in my necessity.

Sickness, while its best impressions last, has a marvelous tendency to soften and humanize the mind, making it more rational and less self-conceited. When one has just experienced a severe illness, and while its languor and weakness still hang about one's mind and movements, it is nearly impossible to be either proud or arrogant. How can we boast of strength of mind or body, when the one is shivering all over from the agony produced by a broken arm, and the other is prostrated by a headache? Brave worms are we to talk of strength!

The day after this conversation a circumstance occurred, which, although it awakened very painful remembrances, gave me great pleasure too. I was walking down the New Road toward Regent's Park, to keep an appointment with Miss Scotland, when my progress was stopped by the collision of two omnibuses. No one was hurt; but the carriages were broken, the passengers alarmed, and that inevitable result, a noisy crowd, followed. For a time the road was impassable.

Fortunately, however, for me, the gate of one of the gardens, which came down to the pathway, was open, and I turned in to avoid the confusion. I had not stood there long, when a groom, riding one horse and leading another, came up, and finding that it was impossible to get on, took up his station on the path close beside me. The animals were clothed from head to tail: nothing was to be seen but their beautiful black legs, and long squarely cut tails; but, having been accustomed to horses, from my childhood, I had learned to know that there is as much individuality in them as in men, and that in look, form, and action, no two are alike. The moment, therefore, that my eye fell upon the horse which the man led, I recognized him in spite of his muffers, and involuntarily exclaimed, "Sancho! Sancho!"

The horse pricked up his ears, turned his head aside to listen, and uttered a low inquiring neigh of recognition; and I had scarcely time to repeat

his name before the faithful animal was by my side, rubbing his nose against my shoulder, and uttering, again and again, that peculiar neigh which horses give when they are pleased. His delight did not exceed mine: for, unheeding the crowd, the publicity of the situation, and every thing but the joy of meeting my noble steed again, I lavished the most affectionate words and caresses upon him; while he, as if fully understanding every phrase of endearment, fondled round me like a child.

For the first few moments, the delight of meeting dear old Sancho excluded all other thoughts and feelings; but, presently, the memories with which he was associated, of free and happy days at Ingerdyne, returned, and the tears those memories caused, fell fast upon his clothed head. And as if he felt them, and was conscious that something was wrong, his neigh became prolonged and plaintive, almost human in its tones of sympathy and sorrow. Meanwhile the groom, who had looked on with silent amazement, exclaimed,

"Well, I never seed such a thing afore! You seem old friends, miss; the horse knows you as well as if he was a human cretur."

"Yes, I have known him from a colt, and rode him several years. He is old now, poor fellow!"

"Yes; but he's been so well done by, that he's little the wuss for his years. My young missis pets him like as if he was a child, and by his goings on now, I think it's what he's been used to."

"Who is his mistress?"

"Miss Bashford, the great banker's daughter. Master bought him at Tattersall's, at the fall of last year, out o' some gentleman's stud, what was just broken up; some capting's, I think, in the country; leastways the men what was up with the horses, told me their master was something of the sort. But p'r'aps you knowed him."

"Yes, yes," I answered, scarcely knowing what I said; and, eager to prevent any further conversation, I turned my whole attention back to Sancho.

For some minutes the man offered no further remark or interruption, but at last he said,

"I'm sorry to part you, miss, 'cos I likes to see a lady as knows an' loves a good horse when she sees him; but my time for exercise is welly up, and he must go. Howsomever, if you lives in the town, an' I'll tell me where, I dessay I can manage to bring the horses out your way, nows and thens."

I thanked the man heartily, for it was a kind thought; but my stay in town was now to be so brief, and my time so fully occupied, that I was obliged to decline his civility.

"Well, I'm sorry for it, ma'am—werry sorry: but it can't be helped, wuss luck. You'll not forget my direction, John Oats, Mister Bashford's, Avenue-Road, Regent's Park. A bit of a note will always find me there, for master and I don't often change about, and then I'll bring the horse to see you whenever you gets a chance to come to London. Good-morning, miss. Come along, old boy: sorry to part old friends, but it must be. Good-morning, miss."

And the groom putting the horses into a quick canter, I soon lost sight of my dear old companion

Who can blame me that, as I walked slowly on, tears dimmed my eyes, and my heart was heavy? None but those who love the gallant animals they ride, and for their faithfulness and services learn to look upon them as friends, can tell how real is the affection which grows up between a horse and his rider; nor how great is the pain of separation.

Besides these feelings, the sight of Sancho had brought back thoughts of Ingerdyne; and now, when I needed it so much, utterly destroyed for a time the composure it had cost me so much to gain.

CHAPTER XLIV.

It was arranged that Helen and my mother should, with the funds that remained, take lodgings in the country, and that the pearls should be disposed of to furnish me with the necessary dresses for my theatrical career.

In the choice of these, Mrs. Chace's advice was invaluable. The materials and colors she fixed upon, were such as I certainly should never have selected: every thing was chosen with an eye to effect, nothing for its own beauty of quality or hue, but for its power to stand and strike alone, or to combine well with others. All our purchases were made in the evening, and tested by the brightest gas-light; because, as Mrs. Chace very reasonably said,

"Every thing is to be worn then, and what would be lovely in the day-light is never effective at night."

Oh! that word "effect," it is the alpha and omega of an actress's career.

"Now you must have a character-dress," said my chaperon, as we were turning out of a shop in Drury-lane, where she had ordered me a pair of Roman sandals. "I think orange will be the best color for the petticoat, you can vary it so well: with stripes of black velvet round the bottom, it does for Clari's first dress; white points make it old English; black tabs suit it for Charles the Twelfth; or it may be left plain for Gertrude: the bodice gives the character. A white muslin bodice, with loose plaited sleeves, and black velvet straps and stomacher, with a little gold embroidery, makes it an Italian dress; a black velvet bodice and jacket trimmed, makes it either Dutch, or German, or French; a plain black bodice, without trimming, does for gipsies: in short, one petticoat, well chosen, does for almost every thing.

"Then you must have three or four white muslins, they do for half the 'walking lady' parts in the drama; and every body you know goes mad in white muslin: I don't know why, but it has been the correct lunatic costume on the boards for ages. Your Julia dresses, with a little trimming and different sleeves, will do for Beatrice, Juliet, Desdemona, Cora, Lady Teazle, and a host of other parts. You should have a tunic also, and a boy's dress: you—"

"What?" I interrupted.

"A boy's dress, for farce parts, such as—"

"For me to wear?"

"Of course: how else do you propose to play in 'The Young King,' 'Is he Jealous,' or *Romeo and Juliet*, Portia, or Viola?"

"If male attire is absolutely necessary for those parts, I can't play them at all; for put it on I never will."

"Nonsense, my dear."

"Perhaps so: still, I shall not do it."

"Now, do not be 'Missy': if you were to persist in such a ridiculous whim, you would lose half the best business that would otherwise fall to your share, get yourself laughed at, and throw a great impediment in the way of engagements. Besides, why should you object to do what every body else does?"

"Simply because it is repulsive to me."

"Absurd! I really thought you had more good common sense, my dear. Repulsive! don't you know that people who have their living to get, can't afford to indulge in whims?"

"Yes: I learned that when I resigned myself to the fate which pointed to the stage."

"Well, then, *having* resigned yourself, you ought at least to be rational and consistent, and take the work which falls to your share."

"So I will, except in this case: there I am resolute."

"Really, my dear, you vex and puzzle me excessively. You seem to forget that you have signed an engagement to play a certain line of business, to which many of these parts belong. What do you mean to do? To break the engagement, giving this whim as a reason, or go down to Cheltenham and compel Mr. Mountain to dismiss you?"

"Neither. It seems to me, from your account, that these parts which are to me so detestable, are among those belonging of right to the leading lady; but which may come to my lot in fulfillment of Mr. Mountain's promise that I should share the leading business. If so, I will give them up to the *prima donna*; who will probably be as well pleased to have them, as I shall be to relinquish them."

"And you think a manager will consent to this?"

"Of course; why not? You seem to look upon managers as omnipotent ogres."

"You will find them so."

"Then I am afraid that I shall prove a very rebellious subject: I do not feel inclined to be eaten up without resistance."

"That will be all very well when you arrive at the top of the tree; then, you may show airs and graces to your heart's content; but till then, it will be at the peril of your engagement."

"So be it," I said, resolutely; "but I think that I shall neither be called upon a second time to play these parts, nor lose my engagement for the refusal. I will make a compromise, and accept the most insignificant character in the piece, to be spared enacting one which is so thoroughly hateful to me."

"Well, you must fight your own battle; and you will not find it so easily won as you expect: managers are far from being such tractable beings as you imagine. But here we are at Waterloo House, where we can obtain nearly all you require, except stage ornaments and trimmings, which we must get elsewhere. I dare say, Fanny Scotland can help us."

The man who came forward to serve us, from the close rank behind the counter, apparently knew my companion, for, after bringing the orange serge she asked for, he said, "We have

a lot of beautiful ribbons, very cheap, ma'am, that will just suit you; they are slightly damaged, but will answer charmingly for trimming: here they are."

And from the shelf behind him he handed down a box of brilliant *satin* ribbons, combining in their varied stripes all the colors of the rainbow. To me they looked hideous, but Mrs. Chace exclaimed, in ecstasy,

"The very thing! Tacked down a short white silk skirt, this ribbon will make the loveliest character dress. You must have a piece, my dear; it will make a most effective skirt for Pauline or Gertrude, or even Marianna: you must have it."

And so the bright blue, and yellow, and white, and green striped thing was bought, solely for its effectiveness; also a heavy, ugly, mean-looking black cotton velvet, which was to adorn the "gentle Lady Anne," and such like melancholy heroines.

By the exertion of constant industry, often carried all through the night, and with the assistance of Mrs. Chace, who aided us in every way, my wardrobe was completed by the appointed time. And upon the last day, with a sick and heavy heart, I nailed the cards upon the boxes, and then sat down to go through the form of dinner. I was to travel by the mail; and as soon as I had left town, my mother and Helen were to go to their country lodgings. Silently and sadly we all sat round the table, while poor Biddy, who, with genuine Irish kindness and thoughtlessness, had besought me to take her with me, "without any pay but the bit an' the sup, jist to keep the life in," went about the room weeping and sighing in heart-felt sorrow.

My mother seldom spoke; but she fixed her eyes upon me every now and then with an expression of grief that distracted me. Helen, too, was utterly subdued; her tears fell fast, and she sobbed bitterly. Now that we were going to part, and for such a purpose, and so indefinite a period, the love which should have been our guiding principle through life, for the first time asserted itself; and for the moment to each came the new feeling, that the other's sorrow was harder to bear than her own.

At last, the untouched dinner was removed, and I went up-stairs to dress for my journey. Soon after I reached my room I heard a low rap upon the door, and entering immediately upon it, came my mother. The ostensible motive for her visit was to see that I was properly wrapped; but her trembling hands and hurried utterance too plainly showed, that some far more powerful feeling than care for my dress was at work.

"Let me do it, mother dear," I said, as for the first time in my life she vainly tried to hook the chain of my cloak. "You are tired."

"You will write to me every week, Flory," she replied, persisting in her efforts, but trembling so much that the loop passed over and over the hook every time.

"Always, always; and you must do the same."

"Yes."

Then followed a long silence, and she opened and shut the drawers, as if to see that all was taken out of them; but, evidently distinguishing nothing, for those which contained the gloves,

vail, and boa, which I was to wear, she closed again as carelessly as the empty ones.

After a few sad minutes spent thus, Biddy appeared to say that the hackney-coach was at the door; and that Mrs. Chace, who had kindly volunteered to see me off, was ready.

"Very well; I will be down in an instant. Now, dear mother," I said, when Biddy was gone, "let us say good-by here, and pray do not come down, it will only distress you; and as soon as Mrs. Chace comes back, do you and Helen go to Croydon with her: she has promised me to accompany you, and see you settled."

"How I shall miss you, Flory," said my mother, not seeming to heed what I had been saying. "You have been a good girl."

"Oh! I shall write every week, and tell you all I am doing, and you and Helen must do the same; so you will soon be reconciled to my absence," I said, as cheerfully as I could.

"Have you quite overcome your reluctance to the stage? are you quite willing to go?"

"Quite, mother dear; quite."

My mother looked earnestly in my face, and, searching as was her glance, she could detect no insincerity, for I spoke frankly and readily: my secret aversion was hidden in my heart. At first, however, I was alarmed lest my feigning should be detected, and she should discover the truth; but I was speedily relieved by seeing the cloud pass from her brow, and hearing the tone of satisfaction in which she said,

"Then, I am happy: the fear that you were sacrificing your own feelings for my sake has been a heavy weight upon my heart; but now I am satisfied. And yet, I did not think that even the *éclat* of your first appearance, would have been sufficient to remove the abhorrence you used to feel at the very mention of the stage. It is certainly strange; but I am very, very thankful."

And so was I; thankful that she was spared the knowledge of all I was even then enduring; but still mortified a little, to find that I was considered so vain and changeable as that a few rounds of applause and words of praise, could suffice to reconcile me to any thing.

"You will be sure to write?" asked my mother again.

"If I live, you may rely upon me."

At the door Helen met us; she was crying bitterly: sobbing and grieving without restraint. She clung to my mother, uttering broken sentences of sorrow and anger; sorrow that I was going, and anger against my father.

"My darling Helen," said my mother, tenderly, "do not weep so; you break my heart. Flory is quite happy; she says so herself. You must not think every body is as tender-hearted as you are."

"But Flory can't like to go away, and work so hard; I am sure she can't. I should die at the thought of it; I know I should."

"Yes; but Flory is not so silly, darling. You and I have been so much together, that you think you could not live apart from me; Flory is wiser and braver. Besides, she likes her profession, its excitement, and *éclat*! do you not, Flory?"

I tried to say "yes," but could not; so, kissing them both, and murmuring a few hasty words of farewell, I ran down stairs, blinded with tears; and, shaking hands with poor Biddy, jumped into the coach, in which Mrs. Chace

was already seated. When we arrived at the Golden Cross, we found that the coach was nearly ready to start; so, after paying my fare, and seeing all my luggage safely handed up, I prepared to take my seat.

"Good-by, my dear!" said Mrs. Chace, holding my hand in both her own; "be a good girl, and fear nothing. If you ever fall into any difficulty, out of which I can help you, do not fail to call upon me. You are going upon a perilous path; but I don't fear for you, because you are of too proud a spirit to feel those things to be even temptations, by which so many fall. And now bear in mind my last advice: keep out of debt; make no acquaintance in the theatre, and very few out; accept no presents; and, above and beyond all things, keep the green-room loungers and visitors behind the scenes, at arm's length."

But, almost before I could promise to obey her, a man pushed past, with a grunt of apology, shut the coach-door with a bang, and, with a sudden plunge, which threw me forward upon the opposite seat, we were off!

A few miles out of town, at the lodge of a finely-wooded park, the coach was hailed by a groom, who was standing on the foot-path holding a portmanteau and carpet-bag.

"Cheltenham," said he, when the guard jumped down, "and an inside place for Mr. George: he'll be here directly, he's only inside a-taking leaving o' somebody partic'lar;" and as he spoke, he gave one of those peculiarly ugly glances to the coachman, which men of his description call winks. That dignitary, however, was far from being propitiated thereby; for, as his horses fretted and chafed, champing their bits, and tossing the white foam from their mouths over the bright bay coats of their companions, he said:

"Can't wait for the King of England one-half minute more; and if your master's not down by then, off I go. Steady, horse, steady!" As he addressed this exhortation to one of the leaders, the lodge-door was pushed open, and out ran "Mr. George;" who, muttering something very like an oath, jumped into the coach, which, before he was well seated, whirled off.

"Confound the fellow's impudence!" exclaimed "Mr. George," as his head came in violent contact with the handles of sundry umbrellas, which, supported by leather straps, adorned the roof of the vehicle: "what the devil does he mean by starting off in this way, without giving a man time to settle himself?"

He looked at me as he spoke, as if expecting that I should reply; but the oaths with which he enriched his conversation had so completely disgusted me, that I turned a resolute gaze from the window, and feigned not to hear his question of whether I was "going on all the way."

Unfortunately, this contemptuous treatment did not please my gentlemanly companion at all; and he commenced whistling the air of a slang song, which he continued until my head ached: then, becoming tired of this occupation, he drew a play-bill from his waistcoat-pocket, and, to my infinite dismay, began to read aloud the announcement of the opening of the Cheltenham Theatre, and the names of the company; with the further intelligence, that the "Gentlemen of the Hunt" intended to perform several

amateur plays, the first of which was to be on the next Thursday.

"Going down myself to help them; promised Mountain I would: all the fellows are chums of mine, and we mean to have some jolly good fun. Jack Lorimer says that Mountain's got some uncommon pretty gals down from town; so I expect we shall astonish the natives a bit! I'm going to play Charles Paragon—the lover, you know, in "Perfection"—on Wednesday; and Mountain's promised me such a handsome gal for Kate! You'll come and see us, won't you? Just ask for me at the theatre, and I'll write you an order, with pleasure; or get you in behind, if you like!"

It would be no easy task to describe my feelings during this speech, and those which followed; the absurdity and presumption of which is scarcely to be imagined even from this specimen. Mortification, anger, and a deep sense of humiliation, each struggled for the mastery. Never, never before had I recognized the wretchedness of my position so distinctly; and, in those pangs of bitter shame, I do believe that I would have embraced any fate or poverty, to have felt that this man's hateful remarks and familiarity would never apply to me, or to those with whom I was hereafter to be classed.

I had already discovered that my companion's intellects were affected by the after-dinner libations in which he had indulged before leaving home; and silence being my only refuge, I resolutely maintained it as long as possible. But, unfortunately, I was not allowed to preserve this silence long; for, mistaking it, I suppose, for profound admiration, the wretched little creature became so excited, that he began to pay me the most outrageous and absurd compliments; vowing that, beyond all "gals" he had ever seen, I was the most charming.

Wherever the coach stopped to change horses, there he got out; and the more incapable he became of talking or thinking rationally, the more he persisted in making the attempt to do so. At last, my angry disgust gave way to positive fear; and, upon his making me a frantic offer of his hand, heart—and a cigar, I resolved to alight at the next stage, and take my place outside.

Happily, I was soon enabled to do this, for the coach stopped at the next town to sup; and, as soon as the obsequious waiter made his appearance at the door, I eagerly accepted his invitation to alight, and followed him into the inn. Sending for the landlady, I explained the annoyance to which I had been subjected, and requested her to secure for me the protection of the coachman. This she readily promised; the sooner, because my persecutor speedily made his appearance; and, unabashed by my angry repulse, persisted in forcing his attentions upon me.

"You'd better come with me, miss, into my private room, and take a sandwich and a cup of tea there; and I'll send the waiter for the coachman," whispered the civil landlady, while my companion was busily engaged at the side-board mixing sherry and soda-water. I gladly assented; and, when the coach started, found myself, to my great satisfaction, comfortably installed on the box-seat by the coachman. The mail was very lightly laden: there were no passengers but myself outside, and my late companion

in; and the four highly-bred horses sped joyously over the ground like creatures at play. I quite enjoyed the drive and my elevated seat.

It was early, yet the moon was up, casting the hedge-rows into deep shadow. The air was cool and buoyant, the stars peeped out one by one, and through the cottage-windows gleamed the light of the brisk wood-fires. As we passed through the villages the scent of roses floated to us on the breeze; and people standing at their cottage-doors called "good-night," as we swept by. Across the country, too, over the open lands, came the odor of the sweet-bean flower, making the air heavy with fragrance. The woods rang with the songs of the nightingale, as we rattled on, and the banks were gemmed, in the very darkest corners, with multitudes of glow-worms. Up the hills, through the valleys, over the level ground, the horses went like the wind; never slackening their pace, but keeping it up, with their sleek, small ears laid back, and their beautiful heads thrown forward, as if they were careering along for their own pleasure, wild and free, upon some western prairie-land.

So the night passed. At first, there were groups round the inn-doors where we stopped, and bright lamps gleamed from the halls and windows across the pavement, and boisterous laughter issued from the inner rooms, where men were smoking and enjoying themselves; but, as the night grew older, all these sights and sounds vanished, and no one was to be seen but sleepy hostlers, and tired stable-boys. In the villages, all was quiet as the grave; save that, now and then, a dog startled from his sleep by our horses' prancing feet, uttered a sharp, quick bark, and then went off to sleep again.

"Now, miss," said the coachman, who had been completely propitiated by my evident enjoyment of the journey, and appreciation of his horses, and so had quite forgiven the desecration of his box, by its occupation by a lady, "we are going into Oxford, and, to say thinking, there's not a finer sight along the road than Oxford High-street, by moonlight, at one in the morning."

A loud tira-la from the guard's ringing-horn, now broke cheerily on the air, and, being caught by the echoes as we swept down the hill, the sound was flung back and back, until the whole country seemed alive with its stirring music; but, as we crossed the bridge, the bugle ceased, and its vibrations served to deepen the silence of the sleeping city.

Surely, no scene of the kind can surpass Oxford High-street by moonlight; nor can any description convey to one who has not seen it, an adequate idea of the solemn grandeur in which, at such a time, the beautiful city seems to repose; the very air appears holy, and an awe comes over the spirit, hushing it, as if it stood in a sacred presence. As you pass up the superb curve of the High-street, St. Mary's magnificent church and spire stand before you in all the majesty of their unrivaled beauty; pinnacles and tracery, buttress and niche brightly defined, as the moonlight glints from point to point, bathing all in its radiant loveliness; and casting deep shadows under the arch-ways and porches, and into the recesses of the college buildings. Altogether, the effect upon the be-

holder is most impressive; and I do not envy the man who can behold, without deep and reverential emotion, this venerable city—glorious in its architectural beauty and historical associations.

CHAPTER XLV.

It was very early when we entered Cheltenham. The streets were deserted, except by a few stray milk-people, and country laborers going to their far-off work. When we drove up to the "Plover," no one but a dirty "boots," an under-chambermaid, and two or three nondescript hostlers and stable-boys were visible; but in a very short time a smart maiden, who looked rather sulky at being called up, and who announced herself as "second housemaid," came down, and ushered me into a neat little bedroom. After changing my traveling costume for another—which, by Mrs. Chace's thoughtful experience, had been packed in a small trunk, which was readily opened—I ordered breakfast, and then lay down upon a sofa to rest.

About nine o'clock Mr. Mountain made his appearance, to escort me to the theatre.

"We play 'Richard the Third,' and 'Perfection' on Thursday, and I have cast you for Lady Anne and Kate O'Brien. I think you are up in both?" he said, after the first few words of greeting.

"Yes; but I understand you are going to have some amateur performances?"

"So we are: six nights; two a week for the first fortnight of the season, and the other two at intervals during the summer. It will make it very pleasant for you, as some of the first men in the county are on the list. It will help the benefits immensely."

By-the-by, what a favorite word that is with theatrical people: *every* thing with them is *immense*. It matters not what is the subject of conversation, whether the thing be great or small: a "reception"—that greatest of all things in an actor's estimation—or a tiny hole in a white satin shoe, both are alike "immense."

I am afraid that I smiled rather contemptuously at the idea of these "first men in the county," remembering the specimen I had seen the night previous; for the manager said reprovingly,

"I assure you, Miss Sackville, that we may consider ourselves very highly honored by the patronage of these gentlemen. I know Dobbins, of —, offered them every inducement; but they refused: though, really, we can not be surprised at their giving us the preference, when we take into consideration the ladies of the two companies. Why Dobbins's leading lady is fifty at least, and as ugly as the witches in 'Macbeth'—they say she plays Meg Merrilies without making-up—and is besides the mother of sixteen children. Then, Mrs. Torrens, the chambermaid, looks like a sign-post; Mrs. Jennings, who plays the old women, did the same when I was a boy; and the walking-lady has had the smallpox lately. So really there is not one tolerable looking face among them; while I flatter myself that, now you have joined us," here he made a very gracious bow, "Cheltenham

can boast of some of the handsomest women on the boards. I assure you, I am not a little proud of the ladies over whom I have the honor to rule."

I saw that I was expected to acknowledge this compliment in some way, therefore I bowed; but I did it awkwardly, for I detest flattery so thoroughly, even when delicately offered by a high-bred gentleman, that I can scarcely accord the problematical courtesy of silence, when addressed to me by any other. To my fancy, compliments are generally insults: to one's common sense, I am sure they are.

"You'll find this place tremendously expensive, won't you?" said Mr. Mountain, looking round the room as he rose to go. "You surely don't intend to stay here?"

"Oh, no. After rehearsal, I shall try to find lodgings; but as my means are so very small at present, I fear that I shall have some difficulty in procuring any rooms sufficiently cheap, and at the same time respectable."

"Cheltenham is a dear place, I must acknowledge," replied the manager; "and of course you would like good apartments."

"I only care that they should be clean, and in a respectable house: it is of no consequence how homely they are."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Mountain, looking surprised. "What will your great London friends say to that? They will expect you to live in good style, of course."

"I think not: I shall be very sorry if they do, because I certainly have not the means of gratifying them. I intend to take the cheapest lodgings I can obtain, consistently with respectability."

"Ah, well; you know best, of course. You must dine with us to-day, and talk it over with Mrs. Mountain: I dare say she can help you. And now, if you please, we will walk down to the theatre."

The Cheltenham theatre was then a very neat, airy building, clean and light; and, as it had been long closed, the proprietors, upon Mr. Mountain becoming lessee, had expended a large sum of money upon its decoration. I was very much pleased with its appearance; and still more so, when the manager, in showing me over the building, opened the door of a small room close to the stage, which he told me was to be my private dressing-room.

"And now," said he, after receiving my thanks for this welcome attention, "I will find Mrs. Mountain and introduce you to her; we can then go on at once with rehearsal."

Down to the stage, therefore, we went, and found the manageress busily engaged in drilling the *corps de ballet*.

She was a little, wiry Italian-looking woman, with brilliant eyes and teeth: the last of which she had become so accustomed to show to the house, in her character of Sylphide, Bayadere, and Ondine, that she was perpetually forgetting her mundane existence, and bestowing her expansive smiles upon her earthly subjects. She was merry and good-hearted, very vain and very passionate, industrious to an extraordinary degree, and a most faithful wife and mother. With little education, she contrived to do most things well, and every thing respectably. Her forte was dancing; she had been première coryphée.

the Italian Opera House, during the Taglioni dynasty; and a great favorite with that wonderful *danseuse*, who had offered to take her to Paris, and place her under one of the masters of the *Conservatoire*. But home, husband, and children, were dear to the true-hearted little ballet-dancer; and, without a sigh for the visions of distinction which were conjured up by her generous patroness, she made a grateful farewell courtesy, and followed her husband's modest fortunes; which by some chance led him to Cheltenham.

When the manager and I reached the stage, we found Mrs. Mountain standing near the foot-lights, without shawl or bonnet, her dress pinned up in festoons to show her feet—which were cased in dirty white satin shoes, with the round ill-shaped toes which are common to ballet-dancers' slippers, and occasioned I suppose by their frequent re-covering. She was clapping her hands to keep time, and stamping first one foot and then the other, by way of drawing the pupils' attention to the *pas*. Glancing round as we approached, she gave her husband an almost imperceptible nod of despair, and went on with her teaching.

By her side stood two admiring amateurs; upon whom, as she could not spare time for a word, she every now and then lavished one of her most "effective" smiles; and who looked more ridiculous, and out of place, than I had conceived it possible for men, not absolute idiots, to look.

Mr. Mountain uttered a short little laugh, as he saw the "gentlemen," and then exclaimed, "Ann, come here."

"In two minutes. I must put the ladies once more through this march, and then. Now ladies, *ladies*, do listen to the music. Once more, if you please, Mr. Danton. Slower, slower—don't run over each other, step all together: now then, la, la, la, la. Oh, dear, dear! Miss Smith, why *will* you not keep time to the music? It seems to me that you have no ear at all. We must begin all over again. Now then, form into rank; and do mind the orchestra."

While this was going on, we were joined by the two amateurs, and various members of the company, to whom I was introduced; and, in a few minutes after, Mrs. Mountain, excited with her labors as ballet-mistress, came up, smiling. She held out her hand cordially, when her husband named me, saying,

"I'm very glad to see you, my dear; I hope you'll dine with us after rehearsal, and then I shall have more time to tell you so: but just now, I'm wanted in fifty places at once; so for the present I must wish you good-by."

"Charles (addressing her husband), you must speak to the property-man about the flags for this march; he has brought some down that are not half long enough in the staff. You can go on with the rehearsal as soon as you like, I shall be back in time for the last act, and the chorus: by-the-by, don't forget to look to the mezzanine floor; the trap-door doesn't work at all. Now, Miss Allenby, I'll go with you to the wardrobe, and fix upon the dresses for the ballet. And, Mr. Danton, pray don't forget the scores for *that pas seul I dance on Thursday*."

"Pon my life, Mrs. Mountain," said one of the amateurs, as the lively little woman scat-

tered these reminders, hints, and directions in all quarters, "you are a most astonishing person. Mountain calls you his right hand, but, by Jove! I think you are both his hands, and feet, and head into the bargain. How on earth do you contrive to think of every thing in this way?"

"Habit, habit, it's quite natural to me! Besides, it really is nothing, after all; only serves to keep one alive. Come, Miss Allenby, we must go—*au revoir*."

And with this, and a few other French phrases which she had picked up from the foreign artistes at the Opera, and was exceedingly fond of using, the little manageress walked off.

"Macbeth" and "The Loan of a Lover" were the opening pieces; in neither of which I was to appear, further than to sing in the music of the tragedy.

When the rehearsal of the play was called, Miss Pauline Montgomery, the leading lady, made her appearance, and, with a sweeping courtesy to me, as we were introduced to each other, passed on to the stage. She was very tall—taller than myself—very angular, and very grand; a sort of stilted Lady Macbeth. She struck me, even upon this first interview, as being the most gloomy looking person I had ever seen, and longer acquaintance only confirmed this impression: she could not even laugh naturally, and her mirth was a thing to make one shudder, it was so forced and joyless. Still, she persisted in playing Rosalind, Beatrice, Neighbor Constance, and all similar parts; which, as *prima donna*, she conceived belonged not only to her position but to her talents; and the consequence of this mental hallucination was, that the comedies and plays at the Cheltenham Theatre were often the most dismal portions of the week's performance. Her age must have been forty at least, but she called herself five-and-twenty, had lithographs of herself in all her benefit parts (Meg Merrilies and Mrs. Tric-Trac being two of them), thought herself a beauty and a blue, and flirted solemnly with all the green-room *habitués*.

Such was the leading lady, who, followed by the leading gentleman, a retired half-pay officer of the household troops, swept magnificently past me to rehearse Macbeth.

The amateurs stood aside in silent admiration, and I sat by the prompter, on a broken chair with three legs and a half, to watch and listen.

In about an hour the tragedy rehearsal was over, and the "full band" in attendance to practice the music. By the time this had been done, and the "Loan of a Lover" "run through," as the rehearsal of old pieces is technically called, it was four o'clock; and, to my inexpressible relief, we, that is, Mr. and Mrs. Mountain and myself, left the theatre.

The manager had taken a small house near the Imperial Square, and thither we adjourned to dinner; which, with three noisy troublesome children, was waiting for us.

"You will excuse my want of ceremony, my dear," said Mrs. Mountain, throwing off her bonnet and scarf upon a pile of dresses that filled the sofa, and pushing her way to the table through her riotous family: "we make no stranger of you, just a boiled leg of pork and parsnips."

"And pease-pudden' ma! pease-pudden'!" shouted the youngest girl, who rejoiced in the name of Seraphina.

"Yes, and greens—such lots of greens! I like living here no end better than London, don't you?" observed another. "We have pudden' every day."

A scramble for the pease-pudding, from which delicacy each child helped himself *ad libitum*; a quarrel over the pepper-box, which all wanted at once, and a loud cry from Seraphina that her brother "wouldn't let her have no parsnips," occupied the whole attention of my host and hostess during dinner; so that it was not until the children's appetites were appeased, and they were dispatched on various errands, that I could obtain a reply to the question I had asked at least a dozen times.

"Mrs. Mountain, can you direct me in my search for lodgings?"

"What sort do you want? Something very *recherché*, I suppose."

"Oh, no; two clean rooms in a respectable house are all I require. I do not care how homely they are, if they have those two essential recommendations."

"Well, how very lucky to be sure! I expected you would want something very first-rate, and I promised to go yesterday and look at some rooms in the square, which let at three guineas a week—the same Malibran had when she was here; only just as I was setting off, the property-man came in about some wands for the ballet, and I forgot all about it. How lucky to be sure! I should certainly have taken them for you."

"You were very kind to think of me; but I must try to find apartments at one-sixth of that rent: do you know of any?"

"Plenty: but you'd never live in them."

"Why?"

"Oh, for twenty reasons. They are all too mean and shabby for you: your friends would not allow you to live in ten shilling rooms, I'm sure. It's well enough for us poor things, who have our living to get to take such lodgings; but for you *c'est toute autre chose*."

"You are very much mistaken, Mrs. Mountain; I can not imagine why you have formed such ideas of my means or requirements; but I assure you they are very erroneous. I have come upon the stage to earn my living, and economy is quite as necessary to me as to any one else, if not more so."

"Well, well, my dear you have a right to your secret, of course."

"I have no secret: I am telling you the plain truth; but for some inexplicable reason it seems that, upon this point, neither you nor Mr. Mountain will believe me."

"Pardon me," replied the manager, with a stage bow; "I never doubt a lady's word upon any subject but *affaires de cœur*, as Anna calls them; and with regard to them we know they are privileged."

"Well, then, as lodgings certainly can not come under that definition, I hope you will believe me when I tell you that necessity compels me to be economical; and that, as the first step toward being so, I must content myself with the most *inexpensive rooms* I can find."

"Exactly. I understand perfectly; and as it happens, I think I know the very place: cheap

and pretty. Do you remember a little cottage with a green veranda and balcony, close to the theatre; where I stopped this morning, as we went down, to speak to a very smart lady?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Well, there is a very pretty drawing-room and bedroom to let there, the rent for which would be almost nominal, if the tenant would be satisfied with very little attendance; as the owner, who is an artist, keeps no servant, has only the assistance of a charwoman, and being out a great deal every day, can not pay much attention to her lodger. The rooms are tastily furnished, and the landlady perfectly respectable, although very talkative, showy, and silly. If you think you would like to try the place, we will stroll down after tea."

"Thank you, I should like it very much; but, being so new to all this kind of thing, I must rely upon your judgment and advice. If you and Mrs. Mountain think the house and its mistress are what they ought to be, a few personal inconveniences will be of no consequence. But will the lady be prepared to receive me to-night, do you think?"

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Mountain: "but that is no matter; if you like the rooms and the landlady, you had better engage them even if they can not be ready for you for a day or two. I have a spare room here, until Captain Fortescue—one of our amateurs—comes, and you are very welcome to it."

"Yes, that is the best way," observed the manager. "So, after tea, we will go down and see how the land lies, and then—I think you paid your bill at the 'Plow' this morning before you came out?—order all your luggage to be sent down to the cottage, except any little dressing-case or so, that you may want here."

"You are very good," I said thankfully; "I can not express how much obliged I feel, and if the plan can only be carried out, without inconvenience to you, I shall gladly avail myself of it."

It is strange that the grace of hospitality should dwell now almost entirely with the poor, and those whose means of living are precarious. How liberally and frankly the poor help each other; how welcome to their meagre table, and best advice and assistance, is the poorer guest. How freely, nay pressingly, is the scanty meal shared with one less fortunate, whether chance visitor or old friend, by the struggling artist, actor, or *littérateur*; yet when these same frank-hearted men grow rich, their unselfishness vanishes, and he, at whose board you would have shared ungrudging, the last chop or penny roll, then expects credentials before he admits you to a seat at his elaborate table. Ah, poverty, poverty! thou art a stern, hard master; but in thy train thou oftentimes bringest fair and lovely charities, to whom the rich are strangers; and to be allowed to cherish such visitants, one would almost be willing to clasp thy rough hand cordially.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AFTER tea we went, as we had arranged to do, to the white cottage. The rooms were very pretty and tolerably clean, considering their mistress, who was so slovenly, over-dressed, and

undomestic, that the wonder was, not that the rooms were dusty, but that they were habitable. Mrs. Morgan, who was a widow, had a habit of talking upon stilts, and her stock of superlatives was prodigious: nobody, certainly, ever cultivated emphatic adjectives so assiduously. At first I was rather bewildered: but I soon came to understand the wide difference which existed between the actual positive, and Mrs. Morgan's superlatives, and then we got on pretty well.

"Now, you'll take a cup of tea," she said, after we had looked at the rooms, "and then we can chat the matter over: I should be distracted if, on reflection, I found that I had omitted to tell your charming young friend every thing, that could in the remotest way embarrass or torment her."

"Thank you," said Mr. Mountain, "we have taken tea; and, as Miss Sackville likes the rooms, there is nothing further to do, I suppose, than to agree upon the rent: it ought not to be very much, considering the inconvenience of having no regular attendance."

"Oh! it shall be a mere nothing; almost whatever you like. Emolument is a bagatelle compared to the society and friendship of so fascinating a lady as Miss Sackville. When I reflect upon the distractingly lonely life I have led since my dearest Isabel left me, I am at a loss to express my transports at the delicious prospect of again opening my doors to one who may be equally beloved."

What hard work one sometimes finds it to refrain from laughing outright at people's absurdities; and what torture it is to look grave, when others look so solemnly foolish.

"Well, I'm sure I hope you'll get on together," said poor Mr. Mountain, innocently.

"Oh! there can be no doubt of it: it would be worse than treason to suffer the faintest doubt to exist upon so sacred a theme. And when, therefore, may I hope for the felicity of receiving you, my dearest madam?"

I looked for help to Mr. Mountain, for I felt that if I spoke, I should most certainly lose all command over my risible muscles, and offend Mrs. Morgan beyond the hope of forgiveness.

"We have only to decide about the rent, and then—"

"The rent," exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, interrupting: "ah! true I had forgotten that. Well, that is easily settled: suppose we say ten shillings a week. You will not hesitate to acknowledge that the sum is ludicrously small for the style of thing you have here. This view of Leckhampton is exquisite; as an artist, I do not scruple to pronounce it intensely beautiful."

"Well, Miss Sackville, what do you say?" asked Mr. Mountain.

"That I think I can not do better than fix myself here; especially if Mrs. Morgan can receive me to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted beyond measure to do so, indeed, every hour will appear an existence to me until then."

"To-morrow then, after rehearsal, I shall hope to be with you."

Upon entering the theatre the next day, the first person I met, was my unpleasant traveling companion in the mail. His start of astonishment at seeing me would have been ridiculous if I had not been too much annoyed by the en-

counter to find amusement from any thing pertaining to him; so with a bow (which Miss Montgomery pronounced to be 'immense') I acknowledged his salutation, and passed on.

"Richard the Third," in which I was to figure as the Lady Anne, and "Perfection," in which I was to enact the heroine, were this day's rehearsal, after the "Macbeth" music. To my great annoyance, I found that "Mr. George," or, as he was described in the bills, "George Annesley, Esq.," was to be Charles Paragon, and another amateur, one degree worse, the Richard.

Gauche, inexperienced, and nervous as I was, my acting was good in comparison with that of these dreadful amateurs. They ranted and stormed when they should have been quiet; muttered or whispered when they should have thundered; stood a foot in advance of the people they addressed; finished an exit speech in the middle of the stage, and walked off in awkward silence; turned their backs to the audience, and kept the stage waiting, until the patience of the prompter, and the equanimity of the acting manager, were utterly exhausted.

"Oh! Mr. Mountain," I exclaimed, in despair, "pray, let Miss Montgomery play Kate to-morrow. I should be nervous for myself, even if I had an experienced Charles; but with that hopelessly stupid creature, what shall I do? He will want help and so will I, and neither of us can give it to the other."

"Never fear, never fear. Between ourselves, Mr. Annesley is safe to make a regular mull of Charles; but the house will be full of his friends, who come prepared to think him a Garrick, and who will have no attention to spare for the rest of us; so you will be sure of a good-natured audience, which is a great thing for a novice. Besides, you will look charming, speak sensibly, and act rationally, which is a great deal more than I can say for half the Kates on the boards. And, by-the-by, talking of Kate, how would you like me to put up 'Taming of the Shrew' for you? I think you'd make a capital Kate, and it's always a safe piece with the audience."

"Oh! thank you; but pray, do not put up any thing for me: the very idea frightens me. I would much rather play some part of ten lines."

"You'll not say so this time six months," answered the manager, as he hurried away.

The night of this day, the first I had ever spent so utterly alone, was indeed desolate. It was a fête night at Pittville, and the theatre quarter was deserted, so that a step upon the pavement below made me start. The tidy room, about which there did not lie one friendly piece of home-like litter, and which, in that respect, reminded me painfully of that sad first night in London, which I had spent with Mr. Spencer in my mother's lodgings—the first in which I had realized our helpless poverty. The cold passionless moon, gleaming in through the veranda-shaded window, making all things look solemn and chill, in her white melancholy light; and the unbroken silence of the house, in which no living thing appeared to move, all conspired to make me feel lonely and wretched. The energy of heroism and self-sacrifice was gone, and I felt a very poor helpless creature. There is no cure so effectual for self-conceit, as solitude and inaction. The greatest heroine who ever lived, shut

up in a commonplace room, with no one to speak to, and nothing to do, will sink down into an ordinary mortal like the rest of us.

That night, as I sat gazing vacantly into the quiet room, I lost sight of all the high motives and urgent needs which had placed me there: forgot all that might have encouraged, and fortified me, and feeling only that I was *alone*, laid my head down, and wept bitterly.

The next day Mr. Annesley, who seemed to have the redeeming grace of shame left, came up to me when I first entered the theatre, and offering me a bouquet of superb hot-house flowers, said,

"From something which I heard you say to Mrs. Mountain yesterday, I found out that you are fond of flowers; and I have brought these, hoping that you will accept them as a peace-offering, with an apology for language which I am ashamed to remember."

The words evidently cost him some pain to utter; and, seeing that they did so, and, moreover, admiring the spirit which dictated them, I replied,

"The last, I accept with very great pleasure: but the flowers, beautiful as they are, I am sorry to be obliged to decline."

"I hope not; I shall be so vexed—I got them on purpose."

I could not help laughing at this boyish speech; there was something so *naïve* and genuine about it, as well as the look of vexation with which he regarded the beautiful exotics.

"I regret being unable to accept them, Mr. Annesley, and am very much obliged to you. They need not be wasted, however; give them to Miss Montgomery, she will be delighted."

"I'll be hanged if I do. Why, she's as old and ugly as Sycorax! I beg your pardon with all my heart, if she's a friend of yours, but we Trinity fellows don't usually get up Platonics with Hecate, or any of her sisterhood."

"Well, then, bestow them upon Miss Latour."

"No; you take them."

"I wish I could, but I really can not."

"Why?"

"Because I never receive presents."

"But flowers; every body takes flowers; there's nothing in that, you know. Do have them; I gathered them myself."

I laughed again; the pathetic tones of his voice, as he turned the flowers round and round, were irresistible.

"Now you're laughing at me; and, by Jove! it's too bad. You froze me into ice with your empress-of-Russia bow yesterday—though I confess that I quite deserved it—and now you won't take my flowers, and be friends, as the children say: that's not making it up with a man."

"Oh! yes, it is: it is not necessary to accept a present to ratify a truce; but it is necessary, that, when you have made up your mind, you should adhere to your resolve."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, then, it's of no use talking any more about it; you have made up your mind, and so have I. I got these flowers for you, and nobody else; and nobody else shall have them, so here goes!"—and with an impatient jerk, he deposited the bouquet at the bottom of a pail of muddy water, which stood near.

In this one act of pettish temper, I read George Annesley's whole character and history; and the opinion I formed then, was only confirmed by longer acquaintance. In a very short time we became good friends; for although he was a complete *enfant gâté*, and addicted to the bad habits which had so greatly annoyed me in the mail, still he had a great deal of good sense and feeling, and really tried to give up his objectionable ways and words, when their vice was pointed out to him.

Of course Mr. Annesley's attention to me, soon became the subject of theatre gossip: all the company insisted that he had made me an offer, which I had accepted; and not a few were the annoyances to which I was subjected from the ladies, in consequence. But they were mistaken: not one word of such a sort as they suspected, was ever spoken; although love was the unfailing subject of our conversation: since the very day after my refusal of the flowers, he confided to me his secret engagement to his cousin, and invariably entertained me with a long account of her perfections.

Of all the ridiculous things that men and women ever do, these love confidences to indifferent people, are among the most absurd. They are quite useless to the parties interested, and great bores to the *confidante*. I should have thought myself the last person in the world to be chosen for the office: but it seems that I am not; for all sorts of people make confidences to me, and without seeking them, I am in the secrets of half my acquaintances.

"Richard the Third," as it was enacted that night, was a most original performance; all the amateurs, and myself too, playing our parts disgracefully.

"Perfection" was one degree better, as far as every body but "Kate" was concerned; but I was so nervous that I distressed myself, and every one else.

The audience, however, were very kind and indulgent; applauding every thing that was not an absolute blunder. The bills announced that it was my "first appearance at Cheltenham, and second on any stage," and the good-natured people seemed to feel for me.

For a little time my labors were light; the amateurs and Misses Montgomery and Latour having the business nearly to themselves; but after the first fortnight, when my duties became regular, the fatigue was almost more than I could bear.

In the country, pieces seldom enjoy what actors call "a run"; they are different almost every night, and the study and rehearsals are indescribably severe. Scarcely any living being works so hard, and is so ill-paid, as a country actor or actress.

As a specimen of my labors at this time—which were only on an average with those of my fellow-slaves—I will describe them from ten o'clock on one day, until the same hour upon the next.

Rehearsal of the play is called at ten, and that of the farce and interlude at twelve and one; altogether, they last till four; then tired and bewildered, you walk home: happy for you if it is near. Dinner, four days out of the six, is out of the question; but if your landlady is good-natured and considerate, you may have a cup

tea before you return to the theatre. Immediately upon your arrival at home, your work divides itself into two parts; getting your dresses ready for the night (this, if you play in every piece, which is more than likely, of itself is no light toil), and trying to learn as much of your parts as you can. The latter you do while you drink your tea, and at the same time transfer the black stripes from the orange petticoat you wore last night, to the red one you wear to-day; a combination of employments achieved, by resting your "part" against the tea-pot.

The performance commences at seven o'clock, and at half-past six, with your dresses half trimmed and your brain wholly confused, you return to the theatre; where you dress hurriedly, and get into a quiet corner to obtain, if possible, some knowledge of the speeches you have to deliver. Between the acts, and at every odd moment, you do the same; thus learning, as it were, scene by scene, as you want it. At twelve the curtain falls for the night, and before leaving the theatre, you run into the green-room to see the "call" for the next day; from which you probably learn that two pieces you have never seen (although both are stock favorites), are to be played, and that you are cast for parts in both. If you have no books of the pieces, you waste a quarter of an hour in finding the prompter, and coaxing him to lend you some; which he does, with a strict injunction either to return them to him at rehearsal next day, or to send them on to the walking gentleman, who like yourself has five or six unprofitable lengths in each. Home you go, faint and weary, longing for rest, although you know that it is impossible to obtain it yet. Upon the table stands your meagre supper; and, if you are not too tired you cut something from dish and loaf, pour out and swallow a glass of water, push your hair back, to cool and lighten your throbbing head, and then sit down with paper and pen, to copy your parts for the next night. As you write, you find the greatest difficulty in keeping your eyes open, they ache and burn so; but you know from experience that it would be unsafe to leave any thing for the morning, and, although you might from habit, copy while half asleep, yet you dare not indulge so far; since, by writing attentively, you have a better chance of impressing the words upon your mind.

Many, many times before the task is done, you lay down the pen, and covering your burning eyes with feverish hands, shield them for a few minutes from the light; but rest is impossible until work is done, and knowing that, you bend down again to the paper, and write on. At last, as the town clock strikes three, you creep wearily up-stairs to bed, where you fall into a restless sleep until half-past eight; when you get up, eat a wretched breakfast, and prepare to repeat again the routine of yesterday's work.

And for all this, "walking ladies" receive magnificent salaries varying from eighteen shillings to two pounds a week, with the occasional privilege of "ticket," or benefit-nights; doubtful goods both, the last especially, since in most cases the only person really benefited is the manager. Unattractive and laborious as this life may seem, my sketch of it is correct, and unexaggerated; being rather under than over drawn.

At this time the Cheltenham theatre was famous for the number and rank of the men who frequented the *coulisses*. Worse, ten thousand times, than the anger or familiarity of the audience, were these men to me; and I will add, that of all the practices and temptations that can be devised for the destruction of an actress's moral integrity, this hateful custom of admitting strangers behind the scenes, is the worst. But remonstrance upon the subject is generally useless, and it was especially so with the Cheltenham manager and his wife. The latter had been so much accustomed to see the men from the omnibus-box, from the stalls, and from the most *distingué* boxes in the opera house, behind the scenes there, that she could not comprehend the injurious tendency of the system; and the golden payment for box-tickets which were never used, was far too acceptable to Mr. Mountain, to allow him to disapprove of so lucrative a custom.

The only remedy left to me, therefore, was to resist every attempt made to carry the conversation further than a distant greeting of formal courtesy, and never, under any circumstances, to permit my acquaintance to be claimed, out of the theatre, by any *habitué* of it.

Oh! the vapid, meaningless nonsense these men talked, the exaggerated compliments they paid, and the covert insolence of their flatteries! I used to wonder how the women to whom they were addressed, could endure, far less delight in them; and custom, so far from reconciling me to the practice, only offended and exasperated me more.

For the first few weeks my mother's weekly correspondence never failed, but after a time, her letters became less and less frequent, and at last I seldom heard from her more than once a month. Meantime, a week never passed without bringing me a letter from Mrs. Lyndon; and when she learned that I was located in Cheltenham for the season, she sent me letters of introduction to every one she knew there, or with whom she could make interest.

But these introductions, kindly as they were meant, became a source of continual annoyance to me. I could not endure the condescending manner of my visitors, and used to offend them grievously in consequence. In particular I remember the wife of one of the county members for —shire, who patronized me so coolly, asked me such strange questions—as if I were either a mendicant, or a traveling puppet—that I rebelled at once, and treating her with the same *hauteur* that she bestowed upon me, mortified her so much, that she not only never came again, but did all she could to injure my benefit.

Still there were many others from whom I experienced the very reverse treatment. Women, who holding recognized places in the world's eye, treated me as they would have done at Ingerdyne; and, pitying the misfortunes which had placed me where I was, did more than honor to the motives which kept me there. Among those whose names lay enshrined in my heart, one lady, to whom I was not introduced until some months after this time, takes the first place. She was the wife of a gallant old Waterloo colonel, who lived in a fairy-like place near Swansea; and where after Mrs. Lyndon's letter of introduction, I was welcomed as a relative.

The daughter of an earl, and wife of a man

honored by his country and beloved by his neighbors, herself exemplary in every relation of life, and looked up to by all who knew her as a pattern, Lady Frances Hastings felt her position in the world was too well-established, to be jeopardized by her friendship for the pupil of her old friend : even although she was presented to her notice, in the questionable position of a country actress. And Colonel Hastings, proud of his country's approbation, proud of his wife and her gracefully womanly independence, was generously pleased to show kindness to a soldier's daughter ; he not only gave me the warmest invitations to his house, but enabled me to accept them, by driving over to Swansea for me every Saturday after rehearsal, and taking me to Lily Bank to spend Saturday afternoon, and Sunday. Lily Bank was always a happy place to me, I was so completely at home ; no one patronized or noticed me there, differently from the usual visitors : there, I was always Miss Sackville, the friend and guest of the hostess, and (taking their tone from her), every one behaved becomingly.

That people generally avoid actresses and look upon them askance, is not very surprising, all things considered ; but that they should make no distinction between those whose integrity is unquestioned and those whose names are sullied, is both strange and unjust. In my very limited theatrical acquaintance, I could name many women whose pure natures, and spotless fame, would grace any station, but who yet are classed with the herd ; and upon whom, women without half their talent, and with none of the temptation they so bravely resist, dare to look down as unworthy their society. Reverse their positions : give the woman of wealth and rank, the trials, temptations, and scant means of the actress, and consider how she would acquit herself ; the actress need not fear the comparison.

There is no true womanliness, either, or even the grace of good breeding, on the part of these exclusives. They meet the actress in their walks, in society ; her appearance and manners are those of a lady, of that independent station from which it may be that the misfortunes of others have for a time removed her ; they ought to recognize her, for they have been asked to do so by those who know her well, and vouch for her perfect worthiness, but they do not : though the *men* of their family have perhaps called upon her, and raise their hats as they pass, the women greet her with an insolent stare, as if to crush, by their contemptuous scorn, the girl whose own integrity bears her up, while enduring night after night, trials of fortitude a thousand times more terrible.

If such women knew how soon, after the first natural craving for sympathy has been chilled by their heartless arrogance, the young actress learns to repay scorn for scorn, and to forget their littleness except when it suggests a theme for ridicule, they would not be so unmindful of what is due to their own dignity, as well as to the feelings of another.

But let me be just : it is only in certain places, and by certain people that such contumely is shown. Women whose position is undoubted, who hold by acknowledged right the place they *claim*, or whose talents, integrity, and goodness are unquestioned, never commit such outrages upon good feeling and good breeding. I never

received rudeness, incivility, impertinence, or patronage from any but people who wished to assume an importance to which they were not entitled, and whose minds were as mediocre as their true position. And I have repeatedly heard similar remarks, made by persons whose experience of human nature, entitled their opinion to respect and attention. Certainly the higher the rank, talents, and virtues of those with whom I came in contact during my theatrical career, the more distinguished and cordial were their friendship, kindness, and courtesy.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Just at this time the farce of "Rory O'More" which the talent and humor of Tyrone Power rendered so popular, came out ; and the Cheltenham people being wild to see it, the brother of one of the amateurs, a Captain Forrest, offered to play Rory, while I was to enact Kathleen.

In this character, my knowledge of the habits and manners of my country people, and the brogue I could assume at will, helped me greatly. The songs, too, were so easy that I had no difficulty with them ; and to my great astonishment I was invariably encored in the first. Captain Forrest had been stationed for a considerable time in Ireland, and made the best Rory—with the exception of Power—I ever saw. The piece, therefore went off with great *éclat* ; it was repeated to full houses every night for some time, and established me as a favorite with the audience.

If I could have conquered the nervous trepidation, which embarrassed me even then as much as upon my first appearance, I should not have suffered so painfully, nor have disappointed myself so often ; but I trembled so much every time that I set my foot upon the boards and met the gaze of the audience, that I was quite incapable of carrying out my own conceptions.

One evening on returning home after playing Kathleen, I found upon my table a large parcel addressed "Miss Sackville," and a gorgeous bouquet of hot-house flowers, in a massive silver holder studded with emeralds, lying by its side. Upon opening the packet I found that it contained a piece of rich green velvet, and a dozen pairs of Limerick gloves, each beautifully embossed with gold shamrocks round the arm ; and upon the inner white paper wrapper was written, "An Englishman's tribute to the Irish Kathleen."

The handwriting was unknown to me, and there was no seal or other indication, to guide me in my conjectures respecting the donor. Mrs. Morgan, whom I called up instantly, could give me no assistance : the parcel and bouquet had been delivered just after dark, by a man who wore a stable dress, and who, placing them in her hands without a word, walked quickly away.

"How exquisitely beautiful it is," she said, holding the velvet to the light : "you will look absolutely divine in it : those enchanting gloves too ! He's a man of taste, whoever he is ; that is evident to the most confined intellect, and I wish you joy from the inmost recesses of my heart, I'm sure. You have certainly made a conquest worth having. I wonder who it

I heard somebody say that young Lord Glendale was in the theatre last night. Oh, propitious fate! suppose it was him."

"Why, you surely do not think, Mrs. Morgan, that I mean to keep this parcel: that is, if I can find where to return it?"

"Keep it! of course. Why not? I have no doubt it is Lord Glendale; and if you manage cleverly, you may be my lady."

"Pray, do oblige me by never talking such nonsense again," I answered, pettishly. "Lord Glendale is as little likely to marry me, as I am likely to marry him. Is old Betty here?"

"Yes."

"Then will you let her go back with me to the theatre, and carry this parcel?"

"Of course! But what are you going to do with it: nothing precipitate, I hope?"

"Oh, no, merely to give it in charge to Mr. Mountain; requesting him to find out the owner, and return it to him."

"My dearest darling Miss Sackville!" cried Mrs. Morgan, seizing the packet which I was tying up; "pray don't: only reflect one moment—think what may be the consequences. You may be offending your future husband, perhaps: who knows? Oh, let me implore you to consider! such a bewitching dress—the richest Genoa velvet—two guineas a yard at the very least. Oh, do, do stay till morning before you decide. And those gloves, and the bouquet-holder, with your name upon it too. Oh, dear, dear! do yield to my prayers and keep them."

"It is impossible," I said, determinately. "I have resolved never to accept any presents while I am on the stage, and nothing shall induce me to alter my determination. Besides, I look upon this as an insult. I am poor enough, Heaven knows; but if any body wants to serve me by giving me a gown, let them do it openly: I will receive no anonymous presents. And I do beg of you, Mrs. Morgan, neither to encourage people to send such things, nor, if you suspect what they are, take them in when they do come; because I shall always send them back."

When I reached the theatre, the farce was just over, and with old Betty the char-woman following my steps closely, I went to the manager's room and rapped.

"Come in."

I entered, and at the table before me sat Mr. Mountain, in earnest conversation with a very handsome young man who had occupied the stage box the two last nights; while, leaning against the chimney-piece reading a newspaper by the aid of the gas-light, and holding it in such a position as to conceal his face, stood another gentleman.

"Oh, Miss Sackville, is it you?" exclaimed the manager, seeming strangely embarrassed by my appearance.

"I beg your pardon; I did not know you were engaged: I will wait in the green-room until you are at leisure."

"Oh, no, no," cried the gentleman who had been talking; "let me go: another time, Mountain."

"Impossible, my lord," said the manager, rising hastily; "I can not think of such a thing. If Miss Sackville will favor me with her company in this little ante-room, I will return to your ordship in a moment."

Saying this, he waved his hand toward a door immediately behind the gentleman who was reading; and continued, addressing him:

"Will you permit me, sir?"

"Certainly," replied the other, as he drew back to allow me to pass; "I was not aware that I was in your way, nor, indeed, that any one had joined us."

As he spoke he fixed his eyes upon me; they were full of a strange expression—a combination of so many feelings that it almost made me tremble. Compassion and admiration, doubt and sorrow, were all blended in that one perplexing gaze.

"Now, my dear madam, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" asked the manager, after we had entered the room.

"To this," I replied, laying upon the table the parcel and bouquet I had taken from Betty. "Somebody has been impertinent enough to send me these things, and as I do not know where to return them, I have brought them to you, to beg that you will take charge of them until the owner can be found."

I observed that while I was speaking, Mr. Mountain became more and more uncomfortable, and endeavored to close the door which he had left open; but which remained so, as a heap of old newspapers, shaken from their shelf, had fallen in the doorway. At last he said, nervously,

"The owner, Miss Sackville? it seems to me that the owner is yourself, now."

"Indeed! Our opinions then differ very considerably. I look upon the whole thing as an insult, and I am surprised that you should see it in any other light."

"Few ladies would think the offer of so lovely a thing as this, an insult," he replied, taking up the bouquet, and scrutinizing the jeweled holder.

"Very likely not: but I do; and it seems to me that my opinion, and not that of other people, is of the most importance in this case."

"Decidedly. Most unquestionably. But you Irish ladies, although the most charming in the world, are so hasty, so excitable, so tenacious, I am certain that the gentleman who did himself the honor to offer these little tributes of admiration, had not the most remote idea of offending you."

"Possibly; and, therefore, I will not be offended, if he will only take them back again. As you know who he is, I shall leave them in your hands for the purpose."

"I, Miss Sackville—I? I have said nothing to lead you to such a conclusion, I am sure."

"Not intentionally, I dare say; but, nevertheless, I have arrived at it, and can only say that I grieve to find that you have so misunderstood me."

"Pray, pray, stay a moment," cried the manager, as I turned to the door, "and let me assure you that if I do know who sent these things, I also know that nothing was less his intention than to displease you."

"I hope so. I hope so," I rejoined, hastily. "But to say the least, it was an impertinent and presumptuous act; and one that I can not forgive: nor shall I know how to forgive you, Mr. Mountain, if such occurs again."

And, having utterly forgotten the gentleman in the next room, and that they must have heard

every syllable of the conversation, I walked forward.

When I entered the apartment in which they sat, the young man whom Mr. Mountain had addressed as "my lord," was standing by the table, looking flushed and angry; his companion occupied a position about half a dozen paces in advance, but the expression of his features was entirely changed: the look of doubt was gone, and in its place shone one so beaming and cordial, that as I met his eye, the blood rushed to my temples.

"Miss Sackville," said the young nobleman, as I passed him to leave the room, "from the position of that room and this, I have been unfortunately compelled to hear the whole of your conversation with Mr. Mountain; and in the hope that I may be so happy as to induce you to reconsider your decision, I acknowledge myself to be the object of your displeasure."

"Lord Glendale, I think?" I replied.

"You have named me," he answered, haughtily.

"I am sorry for it; because I should like to have retained my opinion that lords, like their titles, were honorable. Your lordship has been pleased to show your charity, in a manner somewhat new and unfamiliar to me."

"Charity! Miss Sackville," he exclaimed, vehemently; "you misconceive me cruelly."

"How? A rich man sends to a poor girl a costly dress, such as she has not means to buy: if she needs it, what is such an act but charity? if she does not, the gift assumes a different and more offensive shape; it becomes an insult. Which of the two is your lordship's?"

He muttered an angry exclamation, and then said aloud,

"Neither: I admired you, and—"

"Insulted me to prove it! Your lordship's admiration, then, is a thing most carefully to be shunned."

"Nay, but hear me," he cried, as I turned again to the door.

"Your lordship must pardon me. I have already heard more than I can easily forgive."

"Indeed," said Lord Glendale, with a bitter sneer; "ladies of your profession are not usually so fastidious. Perhaps diamonds would have fared better."

As of old, when my passionate nature was roused by a taunt or an injustice, I felt the hot blood pour over my face and neck, and fire flash from my eyes. I could scarcely breathe, for the storm which these insolent words had raised.

"For shame, Glendale, you forget yourself," said the other gentleman advancing; "pray make Miss Sackville a proper apology for those words. You are not conscious of what you said, I am sure."

"My dear Miss Sackville, I entreat—" began Mr. Mountain.

"For the peace of your own conscience, for your own self-respect, Mr. Mountain, I beseech you to make yourself no party to this disgraceful matter. For your own wife and sisters' sakes, do not degrade the profession to which they belong by aiding such a man as his lordship there, in his unmanly schemes. For their sakes do not encourage the belief that women, because misfortune makes them actresses, are to be bought and sold like merchandise; rather help us, with all the energy and power your position in this

theatre gives you, to exclude from our presence those whose society is an insult, and with whom we can not come in contact without contamination."

And without uttering, or waiting to hear another word, I left the room, the door of which was opened by the stranger.

I walked home quickly, having distanced my poor old companion considerably. On reaching the cottage, I ran up stairs and locking my door, threw myself into a chair, and burying my face in my burning hands, tried to quell the storm which was shaking me like a whirlwind. For a long time, however, the effort was vain; every maidenly feeling had been outraged, and was in arms: one was no sooner appeased, than the memory of some look or word—not more offensive than the rest, but seeming so—recurred, and roused another into rebellion.

But in the midst of this tumult of indignation, there came stealing across my heart, a vision of the stranger whom I had seen in the manager's room, and whose first inexplicable gaze, and subsequent approving look, formed an expressive comment upon what had occurred. As I dwelt upon the last, the bitter thoughts and angry feelings Lord Glendale's insult had aroused, died away, and my agitation subsided.

The next day, on going to rehearsal, the first person I saw, talking to Mr. Annesley, was the stranger. He bowed and raised his hat as I passed, but did not speak, although his companion did. Presently, however, they both came up to where I stood alone, and Mr. Annesley addressed me.

"I know that it is against orders to introduce any body to you, Miss Sackville, and so I've told my friend here; but he insists, and therefore I've consented to perform the ceremony, upon condition that he bears the consequence himself. Allow me, therefore, Miss Sackville, to present to you Mr. Essex Temple."

In the course of the conversation that ensued, Mr. Temple said,

"Until last night, I always understood, or at least I fancied, that Lord Glendale was an old acquaintance of yours, Miss Sackville."

"Indeed! I do not know upon what grounds. I never had the misfortune to see him before Tuesday last, when he occupied the stage-box."

"So I gleaned from what transpired last night; and how delighted I felt to find that he was a stranger, it would be difficult for you to believe."

"I can very easily believe it, old fellow," said Mr. Annesley. "Knowing how regular you have been in your attendance upon our unworthy performances every night, since Miss Montgomery electrified us all in 'Jane Shore,' I can very easily believe it."

"Miss Montgomery!" exclaimed Mr. Temple.

"Is an angel—don't deny it, Temple—and the goddess of your idolatry. What else takes you night after night into those wretched dens that Mountain calls boxes, and makes him swear by you, as by a modern Cæsus? Why old Darton told me to-day, that there has never been a black Saturday, since you got up this *grande passion* for 'Pauline.'"

"You are incorrigible, George," replied Mr. Temple; "but Miss Sackville knows, I hope, that no one ever thinks of believing you."

"Indeed she knows no such thing. I look upon myself as the most correct authority in the kingdom—next to Munchausen."

At this moment Mr. Mountain came up, and, in a tone of voice in which was concentrated the majesty of fifty managers, addressed himself to me.

"May I have the honor of five minutes private conversation with you, Miss Sackville?"

"Certainly," I replied, walking forward upon the unoccupied stage. "I presume this is sufficiently private."

"Quite so, quite so," he said, with an attempt at dignity, which, being perfectly new to him, sat very awkwardly. "I merely request a private audience, in deference to the wishes of the gentleman who has done me the honor of employing my poor services on this occasion. You will readily imagine that the gentleman to whom I allude, is Lord Glendale." Here I could not restrain a movement of anger, but he went on coolly, saying, "and I am charged with a message from that nobleman, absolutely repudiating, as unjust and unfounded, the construction that you saw fit to put upon the very handsome present, he offered to your acceptance yesterday."

"And this I am to understand as an apology?"

"By no means, by no means: my Lord Glendale being perfectly unconscious of any offense, can not offer any apology."

"Then may I inquire what is the purport of this message to me? For what is it intended?"

"Simply as an explanation, which Lord Glendale conceives to be due to his own dignity; nothing else."

"And that is all: you have nothing more to say?"

"Nothing."

"Then, as our conference is ended, I presume that rehearsal may go on?"

"Scarcely yet, I think; a message always merits a reply: what am I to say in answer to mine?"

"To Lord Glendale, nothing: he is equally beneath my anger and contempt; and to yourself I can only repeat what I said last night—a recommendation not to take any further part in an affair, reflecting so much dishonor upon all connected with it."

"Really, Miss Sackville," said the manager, looking very red, "you must allow me to say, that I think you carry this matter with a very high hand. I have already told you that Lord Glendale utterly repudiates all such motives as those you attribute to him, and I confess that I do not see your warrant for doubting his word."

"Perhaps not: it is sufficient that I do; and it will require something more than his mere denial, to induce me to change my opinion. Even had I no other cause for displeasure than Lord Glendale's language last night, it would be amply sufficient to justify my doubt of his present veracity. A man who wantonly insults a woman because she is poor, and therefore defenseless, will have no scruple in denying his cowardice, when it suits his purpose to do so."

"I believe Lord Glendale to be perfectly incapable of such conduct."

"Why will you persist so strongly in taking his part, Mr. Mountain? You distress me by doing so, far more than he has been able to do. I thought you were my friend."

"And so I am; but what is the use of my being your friend, if you are determined to be your own enemy? You are so impetuous, that you will not listen to reason. Such a friend as Lord Glendale would be invaluable to you. If you will only see him, and—"

"Pray do not urge me too far, Mr. Mountain," I said, interrupting him, and with difficulty restraining the indignation I felt. "I entreat you, for the sake of preserving the good feeling that has hitherto subsisted between us, never to mention that man's name to me again. By my own consent I will never see him; and nothing but the force of circumstances, such as I can not foresee at present, shall ever compel me to speak to him."

"But how can you avoid it? His lordship is one of my best patrons, and as such, will ever have the *entrée* of the green room."

"I do not visit it much now; I will visit it less."

"Pardon me; I can not suffer his lordship to be insulted in any theatre of which I am manager."

I could control my feelings no longer, and had commenced an indignant reply, when the prompter's voice calling, "Clear the stage—clear the stage," gave Mr. Mountain an opportunity of escaping.

I left the stage instantly, and went to my usual place of waiting, a small recess behind the scenes. I had no sooner reached it, with my brain throbbing and my heart beating angrily, than a deep low voice sounded quietly beside me, saying,

"I fear that you have been annoyed."

I started; the light was so dim that I could not at first recognize the speaker, and it was not until he said,

"Mr. Annesley has intrusted me with this book of the play, to deliver to you," that I knew it was Mr. Temple.

I took the book mechanically, uttering as I did so, some very commonplace thanks, and he repeated, "I fear that you have been annoyed."

"Oh no," I answered, with a nervous laugh: "at least, not more than usual."

"Are you then so very uncomfortable?"

"Oh no; every body has annoyances, I suppose; and some people make more of them than others: that is my case, I fancy."

"I fear not: you do not seem to me to be at all imaginative upon such subjects; and if I may venture to judge from last night, your vexations are of a very real character."

"Sometimes: although, for the honor of human nature, I must acknowledge, that last night's experience stands alone in my life."

"I hope so: with all my heart, I hope so; otherwise, you would have serious cause to regret your choice of a profession."

"Choice?" I repeated. "But, of course, it appears so: every body thinks so."

"And is it not your choice? Surely no other reason would have influenced you: surely you have followed your own will. In adopting such a profession as this, it seems to me that nothing but the most unconquerable love for it, should be suffered to have a voice; and any thing less, must, I think, be insufficient to make it endurable."

"Love for the stage! Do you, then, really

believe that such a feeling exists in any tolerably sane mind?"

"Certainly: what other motive would be sufficiently powerful to fill its ranks so continually with fresh recruits?"

"In some few extraordinary instances, doubtless, the force of histrionic genius, bursting through all restraint, impels to the exercise of great powers on the stage; but, in most cases, vanity; love of display or admiration; or that greatest of all—*Necessity*."

"But none of these could influence you!"

"You are wrong—quite wrong."

"It is impossible. The worst motives you have assigned are unworthy of you; and the last is impossible."

"Why?"

"Because—but I fear you will think I am presuming too far, in speaking thus frankly."

"Oh no; and when I do, I have always the means to protect myself against a repetition of the offense."

"How?"

"Do you see that white chalk line extending from wing to wing? That is the rubicon, beyond which no unpermitted foot may pass; by stepping within it I am always safe from intrusion, except from my fellow laborers."

"Thank you. I shall then always take the hint; and when I see you upon the hostile shore, understand that it is a signal of war, and comport myself accordingly. Shall it be so? I think it will be a capital arrangement."

"You must pardon me for saying, that I hope you will have no opportunity of putting it into execution."

"Why—why not?"

"Because the habit, by favor of which alone you could do so, is most injurious to those whom I think you can have no wish to injure; and because it is a practice unworthy a gentleman."

"How? I do not understand you. How can it be derogatory to a gentleman, to avail himself of every proper opportunity, of associating with persons of intellect and talent?"

"First, because more than half the people you meet here, have no particle of either talent or intellect, such as you fancy; and secondly, because a man with those feelings which constitute a gentleman, ought to see that, while the pressure of necessity may almost sanctify a certain pursuit to certain people, to him who has no such necessity, their sphere of action should be holy ground: as sacred from intrusion as a king's palace chamber."

"I fear you are right," he replied, after a moment's thoughtful silence; "but I fear also, that I shall not have moral courage enough to follow out my own conviction. I will own to you, that there is a strong fascination for me in these dim and dusty shades."

"Is it possible? To me the whole place, with its habits and people, is hateful."

"And yet in these days of perfect independence, you are here."

"Yes: there is a very homely coercion to which poor people are subject, that is quite as powerful as any imperial ukase, or regal *lettre de cachet*."

"And that is—?"

"*Necessity*."

"You must not think me rude, but I thought—I understood: at least I was told, that—"

I suppose the look of amazement with which I regarded him, as he said this, disconcerted him; for he stopped abruptly, then after a moment's awkward silence, resumed as suddenly:

"You will think me a bear, Miss Sackville, to talk to you in this way; but the truth is, that I have heard so much about you—so many contradictory accounts, and so many palpably absurd tales—that I have perplexed myself, and frightened away my good behavior, by trying to reconcile them to each other."

"Tales about me?"

"Yes; you have quite superseded the King's illness, the Berkeley news, the last hurricane at St. Domingo (which has half ruined some of the Cheltenham grandees), and have completely baffled the ingenuity of all the gossips."

"I?"

"Did you not know it? Mrs. Bellew called upon you a few days since, did she not?"

"Yes."

"And you have not returned her call?"

"I left my card; which is all I ever intend to do. But why do you ask? And how did you know any thing about it?"

He laughed.

"Every thing is known in Cheltenham from one end to the other, half an hour after it happens; and all that Carry Bellew does, thinks, or says, is reported all over the town in less than ten minutes."

"Very likely; although I can not say that it speaks very highly for the intellects of the inhabitants. Still, what has that to do with me?"

"Only this, that you have desperately offended Mrs. Bellew by treating her with very marked contempt; that she has declared war against you, and you are therefore an object of great interest to all the town; who occupy themselves with relating new and 'authentic' biographies of you, every day in the pump room."

"I am really very sorry they have not something better to do; especially as, knowing nothing about me, their ingenuity must be somewhat painfully taxed. I should not have flattered myself that so poor a subject for gossip as I am, could have furnished the most inventive genius with five minutes occupation. It is strange upon what meagre food poverty will exist."

"You do yourself injustice. I assure you that at present you are 'the observed of all observers,' *la Lionne par excellence*."

"I do not comprehend why. If the mere act of avoiding an ill-bred, officious, and patronizing woman be a novelty, and sufficient of itself to make a *Lionne*, the inhabitants of your town of Cheltenham must be grievously deficient in self-respect and dignity. I should have thought it far too common an occurrence, to call forth the slightest comment."

"I am sorry to say that contempt of rich impertinence is by no means common; although of itself it would probably fail to create any very great sensation. But it is not to that alone, that you owe your celebrity."

"Indeed! To what then? You are very mysterious."

At this moment my name loudly shouted to

the call-boy, summoned me to the stage, and when rehearsal was over, I found that Mr. Temple had left the theatre.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

In the evening, however, while I was standing at the O. P. wing, waiting to go on for a very trifling part in a farce, in which the popular Mrs. Hurrey was "starring," I saw Mr. Temple talking to Lord Glendale and Mr. Annesley, at the opposite side.

Nervous as the lights and noise of the stage and audience always made me, the presence of strangers behind the scenes invariably added to it, more especially if they were in groups; and I found, as Mr. Alston had said, that the faces behind the scenes, were a thousand times more formidable than those in front: the trepidation with which I could not help regarding the audience, was absolutely nothing compared to the palpitation of heart, and trembling of limb, caused by the appearance of any loungers in the green-room and coulisses.

The instant, therefore, that my eye fell upon Mr. Temple and his companions, my self-possession was gone, and it was not until Mrs. Hurrey had twice repeated the cue for my entrance, that I collected my thoughts sufficiently to appear. Fortunately the scene was a very short one, and Mrs. Hurrey's vivacity completely diverted the attention of the audience from my tremor and awkwardness; which was the more fortunate, as for the first time they had so absolutely deprived me of memory, that I could not remember half of the very few lines I had to speak.

When I came off, I found Mr. Temple standing alone by the wing, holding the shawl which I had thrown off five minutes before. Handing it to me, he said,

"How nervous you are to-night, Miss Sackville: you are quite ill, and tremble like an aspen. Let me wrap this shawl round you, and then bring you something—a glass of water and sal volatile, or some of that horrid vitriolic ether that Annesley tells me you drink."

"No, thank you: I shall soon have finished my evening's work, and then I shall go home."

"Have you much to do?"

"Yes, as far as going off and on every five minutes; but I have very little to say."

"Then, you will remain here until the curtain falls?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me bring you a chair? you can scarcely stand."

"No, thank you, I am only rather more tired than usual; and the farce will be over in half an hour."

"So soon! I am very sorry."

"Do you like it so much? it seems to me to be a very noisy thing. But I am a bad judge, I believe, for I never can see any beauty in this kind of language and plot."

"Nor I; and even if I could, the manner of

*Mrs. Hurrey would effectually disgust me with any thing in which she played. How is it that you are not playing *la belle Louise*?"*

"First, because, as Mr. Mountain would say, it is not in my line; and, secondly, because

even if it were, Mrs. Hurrey in right of her dignity as a star, would take what she liked: and this is, I believe, a favorite part of hers."

"Most probably. It is just adapted to her; but for you it would be horrible. I'm very glad it is not in your line; I could not bear to see you in such parts."

"You think I should not do them justice? Very likely. I dare say you are quite right; for if I fail, and find it impossible to play tolerably pleasant parts well, how should I get through such boisterous showy heroines as this? But there is the cue again."

All that evening Mr. Temple remained beside me; and I was very glad that he did so, since his presence evidently deterred Lord Glendale from approaching, and Mr. Mountain from saying all the angry things he looked.

Every day after this, at some time during rehearsal, and for each whole evening, Mr. Temple was at the theatre. Wherever I went he was my shadow; and although at first I tried in every way to avoid him, I soon found that the attempt was useless: his persevering resolution baffled all my care.

For many weeks this went on, until the world and every thing around me began to wear a new aspect; even the dusky theatre became invested with a strange and joyous beauty. Life, hitherto so toilsome and sad, was now a blessing and a boon, for the music of my heart spoke to me from every thing: I was so happy.

Had I been older, wiser in the world's wretched lore, less earnest and more suspicious, I should not have suffered myself to be led on so blindly, nor have given up my whole heart so fearlessly, to one of whom I knew so little. But I was young and ignorant, doubting nothing, and believing every thing; and certainly to a girl as inexperienced as myself, Mr. Temple was, of all men I have ever seen, the most calculated to inspire this trust.

His features were perfect, his figure was well proportioned and graceful, and his voice had those deep, low, musical tones which sink at once into the heart. In his acquirements and accomplishments, too, he was a sort of admirable Crichton: whatever he did, he did well; and he could do almost every thing. He was a native of Cheltenham, and had studied for the bar; but for a long time after I first knew him, I did not know his history. His father had been a tradesman in the town, who having inherited a large fortune from a distant relative, retired from business while his children were very young, and sending Essex to Eton and Oxford, and his daughters to the most fashionable schools in London, tried to forget, and make others forget also, that at one time he served behind a Cheltenham counter.

All this I first learned from Mrs. Mountain; who, greatly exasperated by my contempt of Lord Glendale, one day in a fit of passion told me the history of the Temples. At first I was pained; the prejudice of my whole life was attacked, and I was startled and vexed: not so much at the information itself, as because Essex had left me to learn it from any other than himself. I had observed how rarely he spoke of his mother and sisters, and now I fancied that the reason was explained. In a very short time, however, this feeling wore off; and when I saw

him next, I had forgotten that I had heard any thing to vex me.

Meanwhile Lord Glendale annoyed me in every possible way : morning, noon, and night, whenever I was alone he haunted me. Flowers, fruit, music, were constantly left at the cottage by messengers from various shops ; and a day seldom passed without some attempt being made by his lordship to enter into conversation with me : this, however, I resolutely resisted, and notwithstanding the facilities afforded by Mr. and Mrs. Mount-ain, I succeeded in repelling any advances. My greatest fear was, that Mr. Temple should discover and resent the impertinence to which I was subject, and I was consequently compelled to be more guarded in the expression of my displeasure, than I should otherwise have been.

All this rendered my life within the theatre most uncomfortable. Every body was angry with me : the manager and his wife for offending their best patron, and the ladies for monopolizing the attentions of the two most *distingué* visitors to the green-room. To their evident chagrin I took no notice of their open manifestations of ill-nature, and still more annoying inuendoes, but went on my round of daily work, as independently as ever.

Finding that the constant presents sent to the cottage by Lord Glendale, had become the theme of conversation and misrepresentation in the town, and that false and scandalous things were said, I gave up my pretty quiet lodgings, and after some difficulty, succeeded in making arrangements with an old half-pay officer and his wife, to receive me as boarder. They were kind, sensible, and good people, and soon took a great interest in my welfare. They had known Mr. Temple's family for many years, and gave him a general invitation to their house ; while they refused to receive any thing addressed to me, unless they knew that it had been ordered by myself : by persevering in which course, Lord Glendale's presents were soon discontinued.

Of all my past life, that summer was the happiest time ; although even then, there sometimes came over my heart, like a dark shadow, a faint misgiving that I was not loved with the same sincere and single-hearted affection that I bestowed. But such thoughts, whenever they intruded, I endeavored to discard at once, as unworthy of Essex and myself ; and I should have succeeded but for one reason : that was, his sensitiveness respecting the opinions of other and different people. This annoyed me greatly, for it is one of those feelings with which I have least sympathy ; if I *know* a thing is right to be done, what can it matter to me, if all the world think otherwise ? As I, and not they, am responsible for my actions ; it is of all things the most absurd, to allow them to influence me against my better judgment.

This was Essex Temple's besetting sin : the great weakness of his character. His impulses were true and noble, but the fear of what other people would say or think, ever came between his purposes and their fulfillment : his intentions were always good, but his infirmity of purpose continually rendered them valueless. This instability, which arose more from education and circumstances, than natural weakness of character, was the one master fault which led him astray.

But at the time of which I am now writing, all this was hidden from me ; and, with true womanly blindness, I believed him to be as perfect in mind and character, as he was graceful and chivalrous in manner and bearing. Nor was it until long afterward, that the truth dawned upon me : and oh ! what a bitter awakening it was.

One thing certainly struck me as strange, and even in the midst of my happiness, sometimes made me pause and wonder ; and this was, the circumstance of his never speaking of his family or mine, and never alluding to the future. I remembered afterward, how often my kind hostess had remarked this, and in her quiet way tried to rouse my suspicions, but in vain.

My work at the theatre became very severe. I played every night, and generally in every piece ; but, although I felt it extremely, I bore it without complaint. Not so, however, did Essex ; he was both indignant and angry, and continually urged me to throw up my engagement and leave the stage.

One night when I returned home thoroughly exhausted, and almost ill from fatigue, the following conversation ensued. He had been very moody during the whole evening, and spoke in a tone of voice that was most unusual to him, as he said,

"Florence, why will you persist in killing yourself in this way ? It is enough to make people think that hateful theatre is dearer to you than I am."

"And what matters it if they do, while you and I know that it is not so ?"

"But I do not know it. How am I to know it, while you refuse to grant me the only request I have ever made to you ?"

"The only request ! Why, you ungrateful creature ; you are begging and receiving every day : only ten minutes since I consented to bury myself in this easy chair to please you, instead of writing my parts for to-morrow, as I ought to do, and as I must do presently."

"You must not—you shall not, Florence. If you love me, grant my prayer : throw up this engagement, and let me see you free."

"It is impossible : you know that it is."

"Why, Florence ?"

"Because the same necessity which placed me upon the stage, still exists to keep me there ; and while others depend upon me for their daily bread, how can I desert my post ?"

"There can be no 'desertion' in relinquishing a toil you are wholly incapable of continuing, and no 'necessity' that we can not satisfy in some other way than by killing you ; therefore yield to my entreaties, dearest, and give up this engagement."

"Do not urge me ; pray do not".

"I must : indeed, I must. You want rest and freedom, and until you consent to accept them both from me, I can not cease to urge you. I am miserable while you are the slave of that odious theatre ; I can not bear to see, or think of you there : it drives me mad. If I am really so dear to you, Florence, as I love to believe, you will spare me the misery of seeing you any longer in a position so unworthy of you. Ah ! dearest Florence, listen to me."

"How can I ? You are very kind and considerate for me ; but does not your eagerness to

relieve me from a toilsome life, cause you to lose sight both of your dignity and mine? Would it not be far more derogatory to the self-respect of both of us, that I should accept pecuniary aid from you, than that I should work to earn it?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Mabledon, my hostess, in a quiet voice, continuing the work upon which she was employed, without even raising her eyes.

"I am glad you do," I answered, well pleased at this prospect of an ally, "because you must help me to convince Mr. Temple."

"It will be useless, Florence. Nothing can convince me that you are right, in submitting to a life of misery and degradation, in preference to accepting that aid from me which, if our positions were reversed, you would think me unreasonably proud in refusing to take from you."

"Pardon my interference, Mr. Temple," said Mrs. Mabledon; "but I think you do not see that you are inflicting very great pain upon Miss Sackville; who, it seems to me, could not possibly act in the way you wish, and yet preserve the independence which must be as dear to you as to herself. I am an old woman now, Mr. Temple, and have unfortunately seen a great deal of what people call the world; I have learned how even the most innocent actions may be misrepresented and perverted, and I must be pardoned for saying, that I so entirely agree with the view Miss Sackville has taken of your proposal, and I think she could not with the smallest degree of respect for herself, entertain any other. She is placed in a very dangerous position: one, in which the least appearance of a false step, is immediate and utter ruin; she can not therefore be too circumspect; and, however painful it may be to you to see her where she is, there I think she must, and ought to remain, until either her own family or yours, remove her: or until you do so in virtue of a stronger and nearer right than you can now urge."

"Really, Mrs. Mabledon," said Essex Temple, greatly annoyed, "you take a very harsh view of the matter. No wonder Miss Sackville is so impracticable, having you to encourage her: I always thought you were my friend."

"And so I am, and Miss Sackville's, too; the truest, I think, you both have, since I fear your displeasure less than her injury."

"Great heaven! Mrs. Mabledon, do you for one moment entertain a suspicion?—but no, it is impossible, you can not—you dare not!"

"I do not know, Mr. Temple, what it is you think that I dare not do; nor what suspicion you fear that I may have formed: at present, I entertain none; were it otherwise, you would not have been received in this house; but I wish to guard a trusting, generous girl against both herself and you. She has no mother here, and no friend; and, as I have known you from your childhood, it appears to me that I have not gone too far in what I have said."

"Oh, no, dear madam, I thank you from my heart," I said, warmly; "and although I am quite sure that Mr. Temple urges upon me that course which he thinks best and wisest, yet I feel most grateful for your interest in my welfare, and will certainly follow your advice."

"Florence," said Essex, reproachfully, "is this your faith and trust in me?—is this your love and confidence? What have I done, that

you should so disregard my anxiety and feelings, and adopt the sentiments of others, who can not feel to you as I do? How can you believe that I should counsel any thing that could offend the most fastidious sense of propriety? And if I would not, why do you reject my wishes, caring only for those of other people? Were I to follow your example, what might I not fear and suspect?"

"Do not be ungenerous, Mr. Temple," said Mrs. Mabledon, who saw that I was too much hurt to be able to speak; "nor try to gain a victory over Miss Sackville's judgment, by seeming to doubt her affection, and so pique her into acquiescence. Be honest with yourself, and judge in this case as you would in that of an indifferent person, and you will then acknowledge that it is impossible for Miss Sackville to accept pecuniary aid from you, while you hold your present relative positions. Only as her husband, or betrothed lover, can she receive the assistance you offer; and that you would see at once, were you called upon to advise, and were not personally interested in the matter."

"Florence," said Essex, passionately, "do you think so? Do you believe that I am so reckless of you, and absorbed in myself, as Mrs. Mabledon does?"

"No; I give you credit for the best motives, as I am sure she does; but I think that if I were to act as your kindness leads you to wish, I should do wrong."

"Then, thinking so, you must consider me either imbecile or villainous; and in whichever light you regard me, I must be wholly unworthy of your affection, and unfit to be your adviser; therefore, while this feeling exists, my visits must be productive of far more pain than pleasure, and it will be better that I should not intrude upon you. Mrs. Mabledon, for the sake of our old friendship, I must forgive your interference between Miss Sackville and myself; but I am not often so pacific; and, as I should grieve to forget the respect due to a lady, and a friend, let me beg of you for the future to leave Miss Sackville to her own uninfluenced judgment."

And, without another syllable, he left the room.

When I knew that he was gone, by hearing the street-door close after his departure, my head sunk upon my arm, which rested on the sofa, and I remained silent. I could not speak, and my heart was too full for tears. By-and-by Mrs. Mabledon came close beside me; her voice was very soft and gentle; and it was softer than usual, as she said:

"Florence, my dear child, you are bearing a great sorrow, and I fear that I have increased it by what I have said; but you are doing right, and that must console you."

Still I did not speak. After a time, she went on in the same kind, loving tones.

"You think that you have done wrong, and that I have encouraged you; or, at least you wish that you had been less firm, and had temporized with Mr. Temple's wishes, instead of rejecting them at once. And now that he is gone, you fear that you have cast your happiness away, and offended him forever. Is it not so, Florence?—is it not this which makes you so sad?"

I made no reply, but pressed her hand, in token of assent.

"I know it is: I was a girl once, and although it is long since, I have not forgotten my feelings then; and, by the light of their memory, I understand yours now. But you are wrong, Florence; not in what you have done, but in what you are thinking at this moment, even as I speak. And, although at the risk of paining you still more, I must try to make you see it."

"No, do not talk to me now; I do not think I could bear it; to-morrow, perhaps;" and I bent still lower to the sofa, burying my head deeper in the cushions, as if, by shutting others from my sight, I could hide myself from them and sorrow.

"As you will, my love; as you will. Perhaps it may be better to defer any further conversation, so I will leave you; but, as I have some letters to write, I shall come and see you again before I go to my room. Do not sit brooding over this sorrow; go to bed, and try to rest. To-morrow will bring its own burden, and its own strength, and each will be proportioned to the other; try, then, to be at peace."

I did not answer her, for I longed to be alone; and although I knew that the excuse of having business to do, was only a plea to sit up and comfort me, yet I was so languid and engrossed with sorrow, that I could not combat it, but let it pass without comment.

For a long time after she was gone, I sat in the same place and posture, without energy to move; over my senses had come that dull, stupefying torpor, which so often follows bodily fatigue and mental suffering; and which, to me, is ten times more difficult to conquer or to bear, than the keen misery which stings one into strength and resistance.

At length some noise aroused me, and I looked wearily up. Night was passing away, and the faint gray dawn taking its place. I shivered with cold. The candles had burned out, and every thing in the room looked large, and dim, and spectre-like. I got up mechanically, without any clear idea of where I was going, or what I intended to do; as I rose, a roll of paper fell from my chair, and, in the same dreamy, absent manner, I stooped to pick it up.

It was the bundle of MS. books that I had brought from the theatre, and from which I had to copy, and learn, three new and lengthy parts. For several minutes I scarcely comprehended what I held, or what I had to do with it; and when, at last, I did remember, I sat down listlessly in the dull, faint light, opened the book and paper, dipped a pen into the ink which stood by, and began to copy the low-comedian's part. How I managed to write at all, I do not know; for if I had exerted even the trifling amount of reason, which one would suppose was necessary for the mere act of copying. I must have known that the broad, coarse language I was transcribing could have no reference to me. But I did not, and continued writing as I should have done if a Latin testament, or a Dutch invoice had been laid before me; and to about as much purpose and profit. Sometimes I had a faint idea that I was doing wrong; but when I tried to think, the effort was so painful, that I shrunk from making it again, and went on.

At last, and just as the clock chimed four, the door softly opened, and, entering the room noiselessly as a shadow, Mrs. Mabledon appeared.

"Why, Florence, my love, I hoped that you had fallen asleep upon the sofa, and were at rest. Why are you at work now? You will be ill to-morrow; indeed, you look so already. How cold your hands are! Come, my love, put by this writing, and go to bed. But what is this? what are you copying? Surely you are not going to speak this?"

"What?" I asked, absently, as she took up the paper on which I had been writing; "what?"

"This! Why, Florence, you have, surely, made some mistake: this is all slang! Let me look at the book. Yes; I thought so! You have been copying Buckstone's part, instead of your own; 'Tom Tinkle,' instead of 'Anne Trevanion!'"

"Have I?" I answered, laying my head down upon my folded arms; "I did not know. I am so bewildered, I scarcely know what is the matter!"

"Well, never mind: you are tired, and must have rest; let me take you to bed."

"But these parts—they must be done," I said, listlessly.

"Leave them to me; only do as I wish, and I will take care of them. Come!"

And obediently, as if I had been a child, I followed where she led.

When I reached my own room, however, and went to the table, the first thing I saw was a note which I had received the day before from Mr. Temple, and which I had left there in the hurry of dressing for the theatre. The sight of this note dissipated at once all forgetfulness and languor, and roused me in a moment from the sloth of sorrow; bringing back, as freshly as at first, the keen agony which had passed for a time.

"Nay, Florence," said Mrs. Mabledon, after she had suffered my grief to rage unchecked during many minutes; "Essex Temple is not worthy of this. He is not worthy of such love or sorrow, for he is selfish and unstable; full of thought for himself, but reckless of you. For his own gratification, he has urged upon you a proposal that no man, loving you as he ought, could do; and because you—unlike too many, who, thus sorely tempted, would yield to his persuasions—have held fast by your integrity, he has left you in anger. Oh, Florence! my dear child!" and here she passed her arm round my waist, and laid my head upon her shoulder, "I know how hard it is to think ill of those we love—how the first doubtful thoughts madden and crush us; but it is a grief, which, sooner or later, comes to all—it is our birthright; and though we would, we can not shun it. You can not bear to doubt the faith and honor of one you love so well, and you are angry with yourself for doing so; but, nevertheless, the doubt remains; and the only right and just way to obtain peace, is to examine it thoroughly. To help you to do this, I must say what I fear may pain you.

"You have told me more than once, that your engagement to Mr. Temple, is rather an understood than a positive thing, and that he has never absolutely made you a proposal of marriage; although his manner, attention, and conversation have implied it: that he has consulted you, advised, protected, and controlled you, as if he looked upon you, and wished you to look upon

yourself, as his future wife; and yet he has never definitely asked you to be so. He has never said one word that you could rely upon or repeat: as far as spoken pledges go, he is free. He has wooed and won your love, and I do believe given you in return, all of which he is capable; but he has done no more: legally he is free; and although he conceives that he has a right to claim you whenever he pleases, he will give you no right over him.

"Now, why is this? He loves you, I am sure, and I do think he honors and respects you; but he has not the moral courage to say so publicly. To his morbid fancy you occupy a banned position; superior to him in birth and feeling, you are now his inferior in standing and worldly rank; and he dares not be honest with you, and open with the world. He wishes to secure both, and to keep your love as well as the world's favor. He would be proud of his wife, not for herself and what she was to him, but for what the world said and thought of her. He would not marry a vile woman to please the world, but he would relinquish a good one. In short, he is so much a slave to other men's opinions, that while you are a poor country actress, without position or *fame*, Essex Temple will never make you his wife.

"He would lavish all his wealth upon you, and really delight in any pleasure or comfort that it could give; nor do I think he would presume upon any power or influence so obtained; but beyond that, I believe he dare not go. If he dare ever do it, why not now? To-night, how often did I repeat to him, that only as his betrothed wife could you accept his aid; what then prevented him from offering you his hand at once, and removing you from the life you both dislike so much, in the only right and legitimate manner? So far as pecuniary means go, he is wholly independent of his family and the world: he is his own master, therefore future circumstances will not place him more at liberty than he is now; and if he dare not marry you now, no circumstances yet to happen will induce him to do so hereafter.

"Forgive me for saying all this, Florence: it can scarcely be more painful for you to hear, than for me to speak; but I wish you, at whatever expense of present sorrow, to see the future clearly; and even at the risk of displeasing you, I feel that I ought to speak frankly. May you have strength to profit by it."

And with a mother's kiss upon my feverish brow, she wiped away the bitter tears which blinded me, and after a time soothed me to rest.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE next day, and the next, I neither saw nor heard from Essex Temple. I knew that he was in town, because I heard others speak of having seen him, but beyond that I know nothing.

Who can describe the wretchedness of those days! The misery of trying to be cheerful: of struggling to speak and laugh, and to appear indifferent and at ease, when tears were choking in the throat, and the lips quivered as they opened. The listening to catch every sound,

and fancying that each was he: his voice, his step—the wild bound of hope with which each fresh sound was greeted, and the sickness of heart and utter faintness, which followed each new disappointment. Oh, it was terrible! it was the concentrated agony of a life. And yet, after the first night, I never spoke of him, or wept: it would have been better for me, if I had; but I felt as if the words would choke me, and tears were scorched.

One evening, the third after we had parted, the opera of "Gustavus" was performed; I had nothing to do but to join in the masquerade. I wore a Swiss peasant's dress, as one in which I was least likely to be recognized, and with a fall of thick black lace to my mask, took my place among the company. I danced as little as I could; but when the galop was formed, a figure in a courier's dress came up to me, and asked me in dumb show to join it. I complied, and, after a few turns, was surprised to find myself whirled off the stage into the stage-box lobby; the door stood open, and by the light of the lamp I recognized Lord Glendale.

"Miss Sackville," he said, "you will, I trust, pardon my seeming rudeness in bringing you here; but as I have found it impossible, in any other manner, to obtain a moment's conversation with you, I have been compelled to adopt this stratagem."

"What is it that you wish to say to me?" I asked, indignantly. "I have shown you already, by every means in my power, how unwelcome your attentions are, and this continued persecution is unmanly."

"I know it—at least I know that it must seem so to you; but have patience with me for a few minutes: if you discard me then, I pledge myself not to detain you an instant against your wishes, but to lead you instantly back to the stage."

"Your lordship can not very easily avoid it. These are not the days of mysterious disappearances, even supposing this box was in a less public situation."

"You misunderstand and doubt me cruelly," said he, "and I deserve it: but when I sent that ill-omened packet, and afterward, in the keenness of disappointment, made that most unwarrantable speech, I did not know you: I estimated you by others whom I had known in the same profession, and I misjudged you then, as much as you have misjudged me ever since."

"Pray, make no reference to that evening. It is a fresh insult."

"Oh! no, no. Why will you be so inexorable? Why will you persist in refusing pardon to a fault hastily committed, and most truly repented of?"

"The fault was neither an isolated, nor a hasty one, Lord Glendale: it has been repeated deliberately twenty times since."

"One portion of it has, I acknowledge: but I was deceived even in that. I was led to believe that after a time you would relent, and in that mad credulous hope I went on adding, as it now appears, to the list of my offenses, and the height of your displeasure."

"Deceived?" "led to believe?" how, and by whom, my lord?"

"Pardon me; it matters not. I was as much to blame for believing such representations, as

for acting upon them; and it can not lessen my offense to include another in it."

"Certainly not: still I should like to know who has been so treacherous, and why your lordship saw fit to believe any one, rather than myself."

"Because I was a blind and prejudiced idiot," he answered, vehemently; "because my mind was full of narrow and contemptible prejudices, and I would not listen to the whispers of my better judgment, and believe in goodness when I saw it. Truly I have sown the wind, and am reaping the whirlwind."

"So must every man, sooner or later, who takes other men's judgments for his own."

"It was the first, and shall be the last time, Miss Sackville, so you will generously pardon me. I have been a spoiled child, left too early to my own reckless will, and, therefore, greatly in need of forbearance and mercy, from those who judge me. But when I assure you, upon my word of honor, that from that first night—when, in the heat of disappointment, I so forgot all that was due to you and myself, as to speak those rash and evil words—the intention of giving you displeasure or offering insult has been, of all others, the farthest from my thoughts, you will surely pardon me; will you not?"

"So assured, I can not refuse. But do not think me ungracious in the manner of doing it, my lord, when I request that our brief acquaintance may end here."

"Impossible, Miss Sackville: you can not be so cruel—this is not forgiveness."

"I regret that it is all I am able to offer."

"Oh, you can not mean it. You would not be so merciless. You are punishing me by a threat you only intend as such."

"Your lordship is wrong. I never say a thing seriously that I do not wish to be understood so; and, if my pardon is of any value, you have it upon the condition I have made."

"It is impossible: but, why?"

"Simply for this reason: I will never, by permitting or encouraging the attentions of men, whose rank appears to place them so far above my present position, as your lordship's does, give any one the right to speak or think of me, as you have done."

"What can I say or do, to prove my contrition? to show you how highly I respect and honor you—to disabuse your mind of the impression I have made?"

"Nothing: there needs nothing. I willingly believe that your opinion of me is changed; because I have so great a faith in the influence of integrity, that I hold it impossible for any man, not wholly bent upon believing what is false, to resist it long. But, placed as I am, I have need to guard appearances most heedfully; and, if I would always insure to myself even the tardy justice you have done me, I must persevere in that conduct which not only agrees most with my feelings and wishes, but, as in this case, will never fail eventually to win it."

"But you do not intend to remain in this position forever—you are not bound for life to the stage."

"No, I trust not: although I fear that the day of my emancipation is far distant."

"Would that I might bring it nearer. Miss Sackville, give me time to think—to consider."

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My heart is yours; but I have a mother whose prejudices are strong, although her mind is noble: she loves me well, and will, I doubt not, yield ultimately to my wishes; but, at present, she does not know you, and—"

"My lord, my lord," I exclaimed, as soon as astonishment would permit me to speak; surely, you misunderstood what I said a few minutes since."

"No, no," he answered, speaking rapidly, "I did not; but my plea has changed since then. Anxiety, the fear of losing this opportunity, has hurried an avowal that I have long been resolute to make; but which, while it must prove to you my altered feelings, and the deep respect in which I hold you, changes also, I trust, the relative position that has hitherto existed between us. With my whole heart I love and esteem you; and if I ask a slight delay before I present you to my mother, it is only that I may thus insure you the reception you deserve. I do not ask you to quit the stage until she takes you thence: you have kept your place with honor, and so I would have you relinquish it; but I do entreat—"

"Cease, my lord, cease, I implore you," I urged, in so low a voice that it was scarcely audible to myself, and compelled him to bend forward to listen. "I thank you for the honor you would do me, and for the manner in which it has been offered; but it is impossible; I can not accept it."

"Why? Oh, Miss Sackville! if you have forgiven me, why? Do not reject me thus at once; but be generous, and take time for consideration."

"I can not; it would be useless. A year hence, I should say the same."

"But give me that year; give me hope: do not decide against me until that year is past."

"I must; indeed, I must. Neither time nor thought can effect any change."

"You hate me, then?"

"No—but—"

"You love another," he said, interrupting me hastily.

I made no reply. He bent forward again, compelling me to retreat a step, and the gas-light over the box streamed through the curtain full upon my face.

"I am right," he exclaimed, bitterly; "and that other is Essex Temple."

For a few seconds he was silent; then continued: "Farewell, Miss Sackville. I need not ask if my thought is true, for that death-like pallor proves it; and that you are lost to me: though not, as I think, forever. Sooner or later you will learn that you have thrown your heart away: bestowed it upon one so fickle and fearful, that he dares do nothing without the world's leave; and, even to insure your happiness and his own, will not brave its laugh. You have placed your reliance upon a reed, and when you need support most, it will fail you. Faith and loyalty can never dwell with a man who fears the world like Essex Temple. But till that day comes, which brings you this bitter knowledge, farewell."

As he spoke these words I stood silent, gazing upon the floor: without power or energy to answer what seemed to me almost a prophecy. I felt like one standing to hear a doom; and so crushed that I made no effort to reply or avert

I never even heard or saw Lord Glendale go, but looking up some time after, wondering at the silence, found that he was gone.

After a while, a thought occurred to me that I was absent without leave, and might be wanted; and, acting mechanically upon it, I left the box. The masquerade was over, and the curtain down, but groups of maskers remained, and champagne was being handed about; while, under cover of the mask, the loud laugh and bold repartee passed recklessly from one to the other.

No one knew or remarked me as I went by: at least, if they did, I did not hear or answer. I was walking as in a dream, unconscious of all outward things.

Contrary to my usual habit, I made no haste to leave the theatre, but sat down upon a bench in a kind of movable arbor, which had been used in the play the night before. It was placed in a recess at the upper end of the stage, and screened from observation by some wood and canvas pillars, which had adorned the late Swedish palace, and now rested against the top of the arbor. I had not been seated there long, when a sound beside me caused me to look up, and in the uncertain light I saw a tall, dark figure standing at my side.

I rose hastily, feeling frightened; but as I did so, the low, deep voice of Essex Temple uttered my name.

"Florence, Florence, can you forgive me?"

A moment after, and I was trembling upon his shoulder; all forgiven, all forgotten: with no sense or thought but that he was come back, that his arm was round me, and his voice whispering broken words of love and penitence.

"Oh, Florence!" he murmured: "my own, own Florence; can you pardon me? Can you forgive the pain my pride and obstinacy have caused you? These last three miserable days have been days of torture and wretchedness to me, far, far beyond what you have suffered. Florence, dearest! dearest Florence, speak to me: say that you forgive me."

But who that ever loved with her whole heart, and felt the bliss a reconciliation brings, could talk. Deep love, like deep water, is silent. The shallower a thing is, the more clamor it makes. The noisy thunder-clouds are ever the most fleeting. It is the dark, silent ether beyond, which shines on, clear and infinite, forever.

The whole of that evening, neither to Essex, nor to any one else, did I speak half-a-dozen sentences. I was too happy, and my heart too full of a deep, measureless joy to talk. I could only sit upon the sofa in the little home parlor, with my face buried in its soft cushions, and listen to his voice, and feel in every thrilling nerve that he was near. I looked at no future; I thought of no past: he was at my side; his arm round me, his voice in my ear; and all grief, all memory, was extinguished. He was there, and sorrow and forebodings could not reach me then.

All that night, long after he was gone, I sat on the window-seat of the little parlor, gazing out into the moonlit garden.

It was a fair summer night, late in August, and the golden harvest-moon was up, flooding all things in her rich, soft light. Every thing was quiet without and within: even my heart, which had been so storm-tossed for many days, was now at peace—that deep and holy peace

which has no other thought than thankfulness. I was very happy, and a vague knowledge which had latterly begun to dawn upon my heart, "that all good things come from above," caused me to kneel. I did not pray, nor thank God in words; but I knelt down humbly, urged by an indescribable impulse; and lifting my eyes to the deep blue heavens, felt the gratitude I could not utter: and He who, undecieved by words, undazzled by protestations, looks with a clear, calm eye upon the heart which bows before Him, read in mine that night, that, ignorant, religionless, and undisciplined as I was, yet I did recognize, however imperfectly, that it was His hand which had blessed me, and His love which watched over me; and the voiceless prayer of thanksgiving was not cast out.

But while I was thus happy at home, it was not long before I discovered that, uncomfortable as I had been at the theatre for some weeks past, I could be rendered even more uncomfortable still.

From the day following our interview in the stage-box, Lord Glendale had entirely absented himself from the theatre; and, looking upon me as the cause, Mr. Mountain became dissatisfied, exacting, and uncourteous. For some time I endured every annoyance uncomplainingly; I was too happy to be capacious, and therefore yielded to the manager whenever I could; and when I could not, I tried to compromise; resolving, if possible, to avoid the open war to which I saw that he wished to come. Still it was difficult; because an actress is so completely at the mercy of the manager, that the most pacific disposition on earth, can not always endure his tyranny. I am not pacific; and, moreover, little annoyances are ever harder to bear, than great troubles; so that the petty vexations to which I was now hourly subjected, chafed my spirit terribly. It really appeared as if Mr. Mountain had obtained a knowledge of all my weaknesses, my likes and dislikes, and found his whole pleasure in practicing upon them.

For instance, the private dressing-room which had been at first allotted to me, was the greatest comfort I had in the theatre, and spared me many a disagreeable hour in the society of the green-room; and for this I had thanked Mr. and Mrs. Mountain repeatedly. One morning, however, about a week after Lord Glendale's disappearance, when I went to this room to arrange some trimmings upon the dress I had worn the night before, and was going to wear that night again, to my astonishment, I found the door open, and Mr. Preston, the scene painter, busily at work upon a new range of mountains. The dressing-table, looking-glass, chairs and baskets had disappeared, and in their places were paint-pots, rude easels, brushes, and odds and ends of scenes being patched together.

As I stood at the door, Mr. Preston looked round from his work, and laughed.

"What in the world are you doing here?" I asked.

"Only painting out this river and putting in these mountains, that's all."

"But here; why are you here?"

"Ay, that's the question, and that I can't answer you. I complained yesterday of the light in my painting-room, and so to punish me, I suppose, and teach me to know next time when I'm

"well off, the governor has put me here, with cross lights, and no air. But, of course, you knew it. This is your dressing-room, is it not?"

"Yes; at least it was."

"Very strange. I suppose you and the governor have had a tiff, and he's showing off a bit; coming 'Captain Grand,' you know. Hadn't you better ask him what it's all about?"

"Yes, if I see him; if not, I shall not trouble myself about it. What I can not claim, I will not subject myself to be refused."

And so, to Mr. Mountain's evident chagrin, I only said to him when I met him soon after,

"Have my dressing-table and its appendages been taken into the general dressing-room, Mr. Mountain? I want one of the baskets."

He was mortified; disappointed in his expectation of a war of words; in which, of course, he knew that he must be victorious. He was in a passion, and I saw it; and was therefore cool, courteous, and calm. I remembered my childish experience with my cousin Philip, and how easily I always obtained the superiority, whenever he suffered his fiery temper to have way; that experience gave me coolness now.

"The general room," he repeated. "Really, Miss Sackville, I don't know. I am not the proper person to apply to; I am not the theatre cleaner."

"I am perfectly aware of it; I merely asked to spare myself the trouble of going up stairs to find her."

"I dare say you were surprised; but the fact is, I can not spare such a room as that any longer—"

"So I concluded, from finding Mr. Preston there; pray do not apologize" (he almost stamped with rage at the very idea of my impertinence in supposing that he meant to do so), I shall be very comfortable in the large dressing-room."

That week I was cast every night for two or three long and most disagreeable parts, all new to me. I do believe that for the one amiable purpose of annoying me, Mr. Mountain injured his theatre, wearied the company, and kept money out of the house, by choosing every antiquated play, and stupid farce, that he could find, which had the recommendation of containing a long, profitless, walking-lady's part that he could assign to me. But if he hoped by this to wear my patience and temper out, and to provoke me into abandoning the vantage ground I had taken, he was disappointed. I could not help being chafed; but the more evident his purpose of tormenting me became, the more obedient and obliging was I; until the feeling which had at first been simple vexation and pique, increased almost to hatred, and at last showed itself seriously.

I have always thought it was to Miss Montgomery, that Mr. Mountain was indebted for the accurate knowledge of my wishes and aversions which he now obtained; because I invariably found after the slightest and most inadvertent expression of dislike to any thing in her presence, that was the very next thing I was required to do.

One evening when Mrs. Mabledon accompanied me to the dressing-room, I happened thoughtlessly to repeat to her there, what I had said in her own house so many times before, that nothing should induce me to play a part requiring

male attire. This was said apropos of Miss Montgomery playing Rosalind, and as I thought, during her absence; but the instant after I had spoken, she entered the room; and I saw by her smile that she had heard me, and was conscious that she had the means of annoying me further; but I said nothing to my companion, waiting the issue in silence.

This came sooner than I expected, for the next night, when I went as usual into the green-room to see the casts for the week, I found the following:

"THE MARRIED RAKE."

Mrs. Tric Trac—Miss Sackville.

For a moment my breath came quick, and my heart faltered, but in the next I was calm again. The gage was cast down; I was set at defiance; and the knowledge roused me.

I stood for an instant considering what to do, and having decided, went in search of the prompter; both the managers having left the house.

"Mr. Mulford," I said, quietly, "there is a mistake in the cast of the 'Married Rake.'"

"How so, Miss Sackville?"

"I am cast for Miss Montgomery's part; and the error ought to be rectified to-night."

"You are cast to play Mrs. Tric Trac, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right; Mr. Mountain cast the piece himself, and I copied his memorandum."

"Is he in the theatre?"

"No, he went home after the play."

"Then will you be so good as to tell him to-night, when you see him as usual, that I never play parts requiring male attire; and that I consider the one for which he has now cast me, belongs of right to Miss Montgomery, or Miss Latour."

"It's a crack part," suggested Mr. Mulford, pacifically.

"I believe it is; so is 'King Lear.'"

"You had better play it, Miss Sackville," said the prompter, following me as I turned away.

"Mr. Mountain has determined that you shall, and it is no easy matter to make him change his mind."

"Determinations which depend upon other people's inclinations and obedience for their fulfillment, are very foolish things to make, Mr. Mulford; and so, I fear, Mr. Mountain will find in this instance."

"But consider, Miss Sackville; do not be hasty. Remember that a manager—"

"Is not the Autocrat of all the Russias, Mr. Mulford; if he were, I might consider."

"But as it is, I do think you could play the part uncommonly well, and look it to perfection; the season has at least five weeks more to run, and it's not worth while throwing yourself out of an engagement, and losing your benefit, is it?"

"Not if it could be avoided, certainly," I replied, gratified by his tone of interest; "but it can not be."

"But it can, it can; only play this part."

"It is useless to urge an impossibility, Mr. Mulford; I have long since determined the point. I never will play such a part as Mrs. Tric Trac, to save the best engagement within the power of a manager to give. And now, good-night."

it is late, and Mr. and Mrs. Mabledon are waiting for me in the lobby."

When I reached home I said nothing of what had occurred; but the next morning, upon entering the theatre, I was accosted by the stage-manager, and in a very abrupt manner requested to go to Mr. Mountain's room. I did so. The door stood open, and the moment I knocked, Mr. Mountain's voice bade me enter. He was talking to Miss Montgomery, to whom he waved his hand, as if asking her to remain; and then, in a short rude tone, he said to me,

"You are late, Miss Sackville."

"It is scarcely eleven yet, Mr. Mountain, and 'The Groves of Blarney' is not called until half-past."

"Very likely not; but the 'Married Rake'—by-the-by, Miss Sackville, that was what I sent for you about. I have received some ridiculous message from Mulford concerning it, and I have thought it best to see you myself, before the thing gets more talked of, to tell you that I can make no alteration in the cast, and, therefore, that I shall expect you to play the character I have allotted to you."

"I am sorry for it, Mr. Mountain, because it is impossible."

"By —, madam, what do you mean?" he asked, furiously, now giving way to the passion he no longer strove to curb; "do you not know that you are bound to play it, or whatever else I choose?"

"No, I do not."

"Then it is quite time you did know it; and now let me hear no more of such infernal nonsense."

"I have not the honor to understand you, Mr. Mountain; neither, I think, do you comprehend me. I have said that I decline playing Mrs. Tric Trac, and I adhere to my resolution."

"But you can't, madam; you can't. You are bound to play the business belonging to your line; and, by —, I'll cast you for every breeches part in the drama: you darn't refuse."

"It will scarcely be wise to try me," I answered, coolly.

"You defy me, then; but, by —, you shall repent it. You shall either forfeit your engagement, or play what I put up for you. I've had enough annoyance with your whims already."

The blood flew to my face at this insult; but I resolutely repressed every other symptom of anger, and answered quietly,

"I will neither forfeit my engagement, nor play one such part as Mrs. Tric Trac. I am perfectly aware of your power and my own; and knowing both, again repeat my determination not to play the part."

The manager stared: my self-possession disconcerted him. I saw my advantage, and proceeded,

"Before I left town, I made the resolution I have now expressed; and, that I might feel secure in upholding it, I consulted an eminent legal authority, who assured me that, while I hold the position I now do in this theatre, I have a perfect right to refuse all such parts as are acknowledged in every company, to belong to the leading-lady, and the chambermaid."

"But you were to share the leading business."

"Yes: the words in my engagement with you are these:—'Such parts in the leading business

as may be mutually agreed upon.' Now, if that phrase means any thing, it means that my consent, as well as yours, must be given, before I can be called upon to play any character not absolutely mine of right; and as in the present case, my consent is not, and never will be given, you have no power either to insist upon my playing Mrs. Tric Trac, or to say that my refusal to do so vacates my engagement. I regret that this misunderstanding has arisen, but since it has, it is as well that I have had an opportunity of expressing decidedly my determination upon the subject."

Miss Montgomery, who, during the commencement of this altercation, had appeared to enjoy exceedingly the rudeness of the manager and my discomfort, now finding that the matter was turning out better for me than she had expected, and moreover that her rights as leading-lady had been compromised by Mr. Mountain in his conditions of engagement with me exclaimed angrily.

"That engagement is not worth a fig; nobody can give away my rights but myself, and I should like to see anybody attempt it. I engaged as leading lady here, and the leading business I'll have."

"I have not the smallest wish to interfere with it, Miss Montgomery, only as you are so resolute to maintain your right, I am surprised that you should have suggested this infringement of it," and with a bow I left the room.

I carried my point, but at the expense of this coarse insolence, and the loss of the little remaining comfort in the theatre. Henceforth my life resembled nothing so much as that of poor Cinderella with her charming sisters.

CHAPTER L.

IRRITATING and discouraging as were these annoyances, they were not all I had to weary and distress me. Letters from home were brief, and came at long intervals; and never without an urgent request for money, with which it was often impossible for me to comply. I paid the whole of my salary, within a very few shillings, to Mrs. Mabledon, and the trifling overplus was barely sufficient to defray the continual every-day expenses, of new trimmings for dresses, gloves, shoes, and innumerable other indispensable etceteras. It was therefore no unusual occurrence for me to be absolutely without a shilling on pay day. My mother did not appear to understand this, but regarded my inability to send her money, as a mere excuse rendered necessary by extravagance; and in one letter she asked me sarcastically, how I proposed that she and Helen were to live, if I means to help them remained so ridiculously small.

All this was very distressing; the more so because I could not improve or change the state of affairs, which called forth such letters. My benefit was now my sole hope, and I knew that its success was more than doubtful. I was a tolerable favorite with the audience; but Mrs. Bellow's influence was very great, and I was well aware that she would exert it against me. Besides that, Mr. Mountain and Miss Montgomery were each at the head of considerable and adverse factions; both of which, as a matter of course, would unite against me.

Sometimes when reflecting upon these circumstances, I doubted the prudence of hazarding the heavy expenses attendant upon taking a benefit; but the persuasion of Mrs. Mabledon eventually re-assured me and I determined to risk the venture. Another source of uneasiness was soon added to those already so oppressive, and that was, anxiety for the future: the uncertainty of obtaining an engagement, when the present one terminated. But for this difficulty, which her love had foreseen from the first, my dear unchanging friend Mrs. Lyndon, had provided.

A week previous to the close of the Cheltenham theatre, I received a note from the wife of the Bath and Swansea manager, offering me an autumn engagement at the latter place. The terms she proposed increased my income twelve shillings a week, and I very gladly closed with them. While I was pondering over this unexpected good fortune, and wondering how and why it came, there arrived a letter from Mrs. Lyndon explaining all. She had experienced quite as much anxiety respecting my destiny after leaving Cheltenham, as I had done, and finding that the manager of the Bath theatre held that at Swansea also, and that it would open immediately after the expiration of my present engagement, she wrote to all the people she knew in King Bladud's city, and made it a personal service to herself, that they would exert themselves with Mr. Sheepcote in my favor. This they did so effectually, that the result was this communication from Mrs. Sheepcote, which for the next few months set all my theatrical cares at an end. Swansea, I was told, was a very cheap place, and I hoped therefore to be able to add considerably to the very small sums I had hitherto sent to my mother.

But even this did not reconcile me to the idea of leaving Cheltenham. Uncomfortable as I was in the theatre, tired and overworked, yet there was peace and happiness, strength and joy, in the daily visits and cherished love of Essex Temple. Happiness seems a tame and quiet word, all powerless to express the intensity of the feelings which possessed me then. My love was so deep, so measureless, so infinitely beyond any other passion I had ever felt or imagined, that to lose or change it, appeared impossible. It must ever be the same: to change must be to die.

As I look back upon these days, and, possessed of the key which experience and sorrow furnished, can read legibly now the thousand actions which then were meaningless, I marvel at my own blind folly, which could not see what to all others must have been so palpable. But my love was so perfect, my faith and trust so boundless, that even when doubts and misgivings did whisper warnings and foreboding, I refused to listen; and instead of courting and welcoming conviction I sent it from me as a traitor.

This new life had one advantage; it lent freedom and energy to my acting, and the grace of happiness to my manner. I soon ceased to be tame and spiritless in my performance, and the audience was charmed. One night in particular, I remember. The Hunchback was put up, and while I was dressing for Helen, word was brought that Miss Montgomery had been suddenly taken ill, and that Mr. Mountain requested me, to play Julia; and Miss Latour, Helen. This made me very nervous; more so than usual, and I went

through the earlier scenes horribly; but after the first act the excitement of my own feelings gave strength and energy to my playing, and I dashed on fearlessly and impulsively, amid the hushed and breathless silence of the audience. The words poured forth in a torrent, as if the passionate and burning language were the natural and uncontrollable voice of my heart. For the time I was Julia; and, carried away by the sympathy between my rash nature and hers, I spoke and acted as I felt: her words were mine; I was playing myself.

The curtain fell amid an uproar of applause, and loud calls for me; but before the heavy wooden roller quite reached the ground, and while I was still in sight of the audience, my over-tasked powers of body and mind gave way, and without any warning but an increased paleness, which no one, of course, observed, I sank fainting upon the boards. When I recovered, I found myself lying upon a sofa in the green-room, with Mrs. Mabledon and a stranger, standing beside me. Mrs. Mountain was talking to them, and I heard her say,

"This is a most unlucky *contretemps*: do pray, doctor, do your best to revive her. Miss Montgomery is ill in bed; and what are we to do with the farce, if Miss Sackville keeps on fainting like this?"

"I do not know, madam," answered the stranger, "but as there is not the slightest probability of Miss Sackville being sufficiently recovered to play again to-night, you had better make arrangements accordingly."

"Not play to-night! *Oh ma foi!* but she must. See, her eyes are open. How do you feel, my dear? better. Ay, that's right: I thought you would soon come round. Take this *eau de vie*, it will do you an immensity of good, and then let me help you to the dressing-room; the songs are nearly over, and you won't have any too much time to dress for the farce."

"I can not go on again to-night; indeed, I can not," I answered faintly.

"Oh, yes, you can—only try—just try to walk a little, and you will feel quite revived; nothing like trying," and seizing my hand, she half-compelled, half-assisted me to rise; though to very little purpose, for the instant I stood upright, my brain began to reel, and I fell back again upon the sofa.

"I told you so, I knew how it would be," said the surgeon, coming forward and raising my head; "she must go home, and go to bed, and keep quiet." And so, despite Mrs. Mountain's entreaties and displeasure, I did, as soon as I was able to stand.

The next day the local papers had each a long critique upon my performance, which in their exaggerated language was "a thrilling masterpiece," and a most pathetic account of my sudden and very distressing illness.

The consequence of this was, that half the play-goers in the town called during the day to know if I were really alive; and Essex Temple, who was at Worcester, rode over in the greatest alarm, to ascertain the truth of the paragraph.

I was studying Katherine in Shakspeare's "Taming of the Shrew," when I was startled by seeing him ride furiously up to the door, leap from his saddle, and rush into the house through the garden door, which always stood open.

went out hastily to meet him; for he was to have been absent several days, and I was alarmed by his sudden appearance.

"Why, Florence, dearest, I have been nearly mad. I thought you were ill—dying," he said, putting his arm round me. "What has been the matter? you are paler than ever, and you tremble terribly. What has been the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. I was only tired last night and fainted—that is all. But how did you hear of it, and why are you here?"

"I saw it in the paper, and came off immediately. I knew no one from whom I could inquire the truth; and even if I had, I should not have trusted any evidence but that of my own senses. How ill you look, Florence," he continued, looking earnestly into my face; "you have either been worse than you acknowledge, or your paleness and languor strike me more forcibly after the last few days' absence. Which is it?"

"I do not know," I answered, laughing; "a little of both, perhaps: but come in, and talk to Mrs. Mabledon; she wants to see you."

"You do not play to-night?"

"No."

"Then if I can persuade Mr. and Mrs. Mabledon to spend the day out of doors, at my farm at Leekhampton, will you go? I want to say something to you."

"Oh, yes, I shall enjoy it very much: a day in the fields, without one's bonnet, will be to me like taking a new lease of life. I shall be delighted."

"Then, why will you not always live there? Oh, Florence, why will you work and torture yourself to death, rather than take happiness and help from me?"

And saying this, he turned away to seek Mrs. Mabledon; while I, vexed and astonished at his resumption of a subject I thought was at rest forever, went back into the parlor.

The whole of the day he was restless and uneasy, evidently wishing to say something, but scarcely knowing how to commence, or whether it would be wise to begin at all. This unsettled frame of mind influenced his manner: he was so completely uncomfortable that he made us so too; and we returned to Cheltenham, without having the conversation he had anticipated.

It was now time to make arrangements for my benefit, the period for which I knew must be approaching; although I had no idea of the day, or even week, for which it would be fixed. It is a most unfair custom, much in favor with managers, to keep their company in ignorance of the nights they intend to devote to the benefit of each individual; so that it is not unusual to be suddenly told on Monday, that Thursday is fixed for your benefit, and thus to have only three or four days to prepare for it. By the exercise of this petty tyranny, many arrangements are prevented, that under better auspices might be effectual for the success of an undertaking upon which so much depends; and which often involves the poor actor's whole means of relieving himself from debts, his scanty income has obliged him to incur.

This small despotism was exercised in my case; for on Friday night, as I was leaving the theatre, I received a message from Mr. Mount-ain, informing me that my benefit was fixed for

the Tuesday following. This was the worst day he could possibly have assigned to me, as Miss Montgomery's benefit, which had been underlined in the bills for a fortnight, was to take place upon the Monday; and this very Friday night, had been devoted to the first tragedian. But it was useless to remonstrate, and, therefore, I prepared to do the best I could.

"The Tempest," in which I did not play, and "The Ransom," and "Loan of a Lover," in which I did, were the pieces I selected; and I gave immediate orders for the bills to be printed, distributed, and posted.

This being my first benefit, I had of course to procure ticket cards, each of which required signing with my initials, and sealing; which troublesome occupation employed the whole of Saturday afternoon and evening. This done, the next thing was to inclose bills to the principal play-going people in the town: but against this proceeding, Essex Temple obstinately rebelled.

"Don't do it, Florence; don't do it. I'll take every box in the house, sooner than you shall humble yourself so. It will drive me mad to know that you are going about the town like that Miss Montgomery, selling tickets."

"Do not be so absurd, Mr. Temple," said Mrs. Mabledon, looking up from the notes she was directing. "Miss Sackville is not going about the town; but even if she did, and it were the established custom, she would be right to do so. Her benefit is of very great consequence, and I think it is her duty to make every exertion to insure its success."

And with this practical matter-of-fact reply, she assiduously resumed her occupation. Essex bit his lips, and turned to me: he could not endure to hear that I was so very poor.

"Florence, do be a good reasonable girl for once, and let me take boxes in the name of all the Smiths' and Jones' in England, and give you a check for their tickets, and burn these horrid notes: do dearest."

"Florence, do not be silly," said the calm voice of Mrs. Mabledon, as she continued writing.

"Florence, listen to me," said Essex, impatiently, "and do not let any one come between us again. What rational objection can you have to my taking fifty or sixty boxes? If Mr. Giles or Stiles, or any body else, chose to take the whole house, you would not demur; why then should you do so with me?"

"It is so very different," I answered, hesitatingly: "besides, I earn my living from the public, and I have no right to allow any monopoly that would shut them out of the theatre."

"That's right, Florence," said Mrs. Mabledon. "No, it is pride: pride that you ought not to feel or show to me, Florence. Think what I shall endure, going into people's houses, and finding these begging notes from you, on their tables."

"Begging notes!"

"They are equivalent to it: you send these bills hoping that people will come; and what is that but begging, at second-hand? In my opinion it is worse: there is something straightforward in asking a man point blank, for three shillings; but there is not one redeeming quality, courage, honesty, or any thing else, in this."

"It grieves me that you should think so, because this is how I get my living; therefore leave

off grumbling, and help me to seal those notes: they must be sent out this evening."

"Florence," exclaimed Essex, "why will you talk to me in this way? I can not bear it: it will drive me mad. Why will you repeat that odious phrase about getting your living?"

"Because it is true."

"It is not true: at least there is no necessity that it should be. If you have any—"

What else he would have said, I do not know, for at this moment the door opened, and a visitor entered.

In due course of time my benefit night came, and passed. The house was tolerably full, and I was a gainer of thirty pounds. As I did not owe any thing in the town, I sent the entire amount to my mother, deducting only the necessary sum requisite for traveling to Swansea.

A fortnight after this, the theatre closed. Another week, and, leaving all that was so dear to me, I must go forth among strangers again, to make fresh struggles, to gain new friends, and to fight as it were the battle of life afresh, upon unknown ground, with new antagonists. A miserable week it was: a weary heavy time; and yet the thought that every hour was bringing it nearer to a close, chilled my heart almost to ice.

During this time, Essex scarcely ever left me. All his pursuits, friends, and occupations, were abandoned, and to sit, or walk, or talk with me, seemed the sole end of his existence. Presents of all sorts, every imaginable thing that money could purchase, he would have heaped upon me; but I would accept nothing, except one little antique ring, studded with turquoise, that he always wore, and which I exchanged with him for a small emerald hoop, that I had worn from childhood.

The smallest note upon the most trifling subject, the tiniest book, the most worthless and withered flower that he had ever touched or given to me, was hoarded and cherished; but costly jewels and expensive presents I could not receive. I loved the gifts for the giver's sake, and the less valuable they were in themselves, the dearer they were to me.

Wretched as I felt, I do not think I betrayed so great a dread and grief as Essex, at the prospect of separation. He could not endure the slightest allusion to our parting: the very name of Swansea, or least expression of anxiety, or fear as to my reception and comfort there, exasperated him. In all my arrangements, therefore, and all my doubts, I could take no council from him, but was obliged to confine myself wholly to Mrs. Mabledon; who, unlike her usual kindness and courtesy, was scarcely civil to him.

At length, the last night came. That terrible "last," whose approach had been counted almost minute by minute, but whose arrival had been dreaded like a doom.

My place had been secured by Mrs. Mabledon in the Bristol coach, whence I was to proceed to Swansea by water. My trunks filled up the tiny hall as they stood piled one above another, ready for departure; nothing remained to be done; and weary and heart-sick, I sat down alone in the little parlor. Essex was at home: a college friend having unexpectedly arrived from Oxford, he had been obliged to go to him. Mrs. Mabledon was occupied in her own room, and I was alone; enduring a foretaste of that desolation

which the morrow would so surely bring. I tried to read, to work, to fix my thoughts upon the future, to look beyond the present, as it were, into a calmer, quieter hereafter; but in vain. All energy of will was gone: I had lost the strength to be calm. There is a weariness of soul and body which subdues both to sleep; but that is not rest or calm, it is exhaustion; and into that heaviness and stupor of woe, there was too strong a life of misery in my heart, to suffer me to sink.

It was late when Essex returned. His friend had detained him longer than I expected, and it was evening when he came back.

We were to part that night; for the coach started very early in the morning, and Mrs. Mabledon had prevailed upon Essex to forego his intention of seeing me off by it. She very prudently thought that it would unsettle and distress me.

A long, silent evening passed; no one spoke often or much, and although I tried to talk and be cheerful, the effort was so much beyond my power that I soon relinquished it, and gave myself up to the questionable luxury of dwelling upon my own thoughts.

At last Mrs. Mabledon said, tenderly,

"It is late, Florence: you have a long journey before you, and you look very pale and tired."

I started: her voice had broken the reverie into which I had fallen, and I rose hurriedly and mechanically, scarcely conscious of what was to be done. But Essex rose too, and then the truth flashed upon me. We were now to part.

I trembled all over; Essex stood before me, I looked into his face; if mine expressed one half the anguish I felt, it must have been mournful indeed.

"Florence! my own, own Florence," he murmured, as my head fell upon his shoulder, and his arm tightened round me. For several minutes neither of us spoke again. My heart seemed breaking, and by the beating of his against my side, I knew that he was suffering little if any less.

"Why will you leave me? Oh, Florence, why will you leave me?" he exclaimed at last. "Have pity upon yourself and me: stay here; stay with Mrs. Mabledon: give up this life of misery, and stay here."

I could not answer, and in still more passionate tones he cried,

"If you love me—Oh! Florence, if I am not hateful to you—if you would not doom me to wretchedness for ever, stay with me here. You think you have courage to bear the separation, but you are wrong: you cling to me now; every pulse in your frame is trembling, vibrating to my voice: you shiver like an aspen, even while I hold you thus. How will it be to-morrow, when with the same suffering you have lost the support? You can not bear it, and will die in the struggle against yourself; then have pity upon us both. Stay with Mrs. Mabledon: place yourself under her protection; or, if you like it better, send for your family, and let me watch and guard you as men do the shrines they worship. Dearest Florence! sorrow shall never reach you; grief and woe shall be to you but idle names, so you will stay. I swear—I will bind myself to any conditions you choose to exact, if you will

yield to my prayers: your slightest wish shall be anticipated, your wants forestalled, yourself idolized beyond what the wildest fancy can conceive. Your own heart pleads for me: listen to it, Florence—my own, own Florence—listen to it.”

I looked up, I felt my lip quiver as I tried to speak steadily.

“Oh, Essex, urge me no further. You ought not; and if you knew how you were adding to the pain I am trying to bear, I am sure you would not.”

“I am pleading for my life—for all that makes existence bearable; can you wonder that I plead earnestly? I am like a wretch condemned to die, beseeching for mercy; shall I not pray with my whole heart? Oh, Florence! be merciful: do not cast me out; for if you do—but I will not threaten: I will owe nothing to your fears.”

I was becoming very faint, and knew that I could not bear up much longer. I had drawn a little apart from him, and could scarcely restrain the impulse which tempted me to cast myself into his arms, and be at rest. I felt that death there would be bliss, and was so faint and weary, so miserable and hopeless, that my spirit craved imploringly for rest.

But God, who watched me, though I recked it not, bade his angels interpose to aid and save me from myself. The storm which had been hanging threateningly over the earth all day, growling defiance now, as if weary of the truce, burst forth; every corner of the room was suddenly illuminated by a gleaming flash of lightning, and presently a low roll of thunder broke over the house. Another flash and another peal, and then the fury of the storm broke loose: following each other, in quick succession, vivid arrows of blue and yellow forked lightning, darted downward from the sky, and lighted up the little parlor with a terrible glare, making it seem dark as midnight in the brief intervals.

The storm lasted more than an hour, during which time we all sat silent and awe-struck, “communing with our own hearts.” In that great battle of the elements, the lesser strife of human passion was hushed, and when the heavy rain came down hurriedly and fast, as if the angry combatants wept in sorrow for their sharp contention, Essex and I stood up together, calmed and humbled.

CHAPTER LI.

It was long past midnight of the second day after this, when wet, ill, and weary, I followed a quay-porter wheeling my luggage, along the dark, muddy streets of Swansea, to the hotel.

It had been a most tempestuous day: the leaden clouds had poured out their watery stores incessantly, and the wind, as if loth to be behind in making sport of our helpless vessel, had amused himself by tossing her in all directions.

I had been on deck the whole day; for rain and wind were far better, and less repulsive, than the scenes and sounds below. The heat which came up from the engine-room, the smell of the hot oil and machinery, the odor of brandy, and the angry, impatient demands of the passengers, made the cabin so unendurable, that I was glad

to wrap myself in a waterproof cloak which the captain kindly offered, and sit upon deck.

Unfortunately, when we entered the bay, the tide was out, and there not being water enough to carry us into the harbor, we were compelled to lie-to in sight of the town, until the returning tide should give us depth sufficient.

Having no one to look after my luggage or to secure a porter, it was some time before I could obtain one and get on shore. No conveyance was to be procured, and with dripping garments and weary limbs, I followed the porter from place to place in the hope of procuring shelter. All the passengers had landed before me, and as none could go to their lodgings at so late an hour, the hotels were all filled before I reached them.

At last, when we both nearly despaired of finding a lodging, a happy thought suggested to my conductor the name of an inn upon the North Burrows, kept by a very kind woman, who would, he thought, make some arrangement to receive me.

“You do look so dreadful bad, miss,” he said, “that I think if there is a corner in the house as she can make up for you, Miss Jones won’t let you go from her doors this night.”

Cheered by this hope, I walked on; but just as we reached the inn door, we saw a fly full of people and luggage drive off, after being assured over and over again that there was no room.

“It’s of no use going,” I said, despondingly; “you see they can not take those people in.”

“We can but try; don’t give in, miss,” replied the cheerful porter.

“No room: we ain’t no room to put a scrimp in, let alone a person with boxes,” cried the chambermaid, who stood at the entrance of the house.

“Never mind, Nancy, scrimps is onhandsom’ things to look at and make bed-fellers on; but I ain’t brought you a scrimp, so let me see the missus, there’s a good lass.”

“It’s no use, I tell you, John; it’s no use: we’ve turned away three carriages a’ready.”

“Three o’ the old Cardiff Arms break-downs, eh, Nancy? Well, don’t toss your head, they shall be carriages and pair, if you like; but let me see Miss Jones, or I shall be impelled to walk into her parlor in these here dirty togs.”

“Do, if you like: I shan’t fetch her out for no such nonsense, I can tell you.”

“Very well, then, in coorse, I must go in.”

And in he went. What eloquence he used I can not tell, but to my great satisfaction, and Nancy’s astonishment, he speedily returned, bringing the landlady.

“I’m very sorry, ma’am,” she said, kindly, “that I’ve no room; but if you’ll please to walk in, perhaps we may arrange something. John, put the lady’s things down in the passage, and then go into the bar and get a glass of something to keep the cold out. This way, ma’am, if you please; mind the step, there’s only one: bring a light, Nancy. We were just going to bed,” she continued, stirring up the fire, “I did not think the steamer would have come in to-night, so we were shutting up when the passengers arrived. Oh dear, dear, how wet you are; pray take off your shoes and cloak, and— but dear, dear, your dress and stockings are so bad. You’ll catch a dreadful cold, I am afraid.

What is to be done? I haven't a spare bed in the house. Lord bless me! I never saw any one so wet through and through in my life. You must have a little brandy in a hot cup of tea directly. The kettle does boil, I know;" and off she went to make a concoction, to which I have the most intense aversion.

She returned very soon with a cup of her mixture.

"Now drink this, it will do you good; and take off some of these wet things. I have been thinking that if you do not mind a double-bedded room, there is a nice little bed in my room which I could make up for you for to-night. I know it's aired, for my little niece sleeps in it; and I can take her into my bed. I think you'll find it comfortable; at any rate it's preferable to walking about the town looking for a better."

It is needless to say how thankfully I accepted the offer; and to the compassion of that kind woman I owed my first night's shelter in Swan-sea.

The next day was bright and hot, and after breakfast I went forth to search for lodgings. I was resolved to have them at as low a rate as possible, to enable me to send more money to Croydon; and after a long fatiguing walk I was so fortunate as to find two poor but clean little rooms, over a small shop, at the corner of a street which led to the theatre.

The day after I was settled, Mrs. Sheepcote called. She was superbly dressed, and looked round my little room with infinite disdain; but there was something in the tone of her voice and manner, which made me sneer proof. After the first five minutes' conversation, she had lost all power to annoy or mortify me with her contemptuous glances at the bare floor and deal chairs. Indeed I am not sure whether I was not pleased, that the aspect of my room was so uninviting. There would be no encouragement for another visit.

"You are fortunate in having so much patronage, Miss Sackville," she said, in a mincing tone. "I assure you, I had great difficulty in complying with my dear friend, Lady Elizabeth Ferrars' request, that I would take you."

I bowed.

"But she made such a point of it; and I always oblige her if I can: and she promised that you would be so useful, and—"

"I shall always do my best in the line for which I have engaged: Lady Elizabeth Ferrars could not, I think, promise any thing more."

"Oh, no! of course not. Oh, no!" she said, a little disconcerted. "How long have you known Lady Elizabeth, may I ask?"

"I do not know her at all."

"Not know her! surely I can not have been deceived: she wrote to me."

"Very possibly: still I do not know her."

"Then, how—pray, Miss Sackville, if you do not know her ladyship, how came she to make such a point of your engagement?"

"That I can not tell you: perhaps, for the sake of her friends, who are mine also."

"Oh! then you have mutual friends. That is very nice: I began to fear—at least, I doubted—"

What, she did not say; for as she spoke, she caught, I suppose, the astonished expression of my face, and stopped confusedly. It is always

rather awkward telling a person, with whom you do not exactly wish to quarrel, that he is deceiving you: it is apt to unsettle your friendship, and may have an unpleasant effect upon his mind.

As she rose to take leave, she said, in a very condescending way,

"I am delighted to see you so comfortable, Miss Sackville. I desired Butler—my man of business—to look out for suitable lodgings for you, but I suppose he forgot it in the hurry of making arrangements for my reception: and as you have managed so nicely, it is, perhaps, as well; for he is so accustomed to select houses for me, that he might have fixed upon a less prudent abode than this; so it is better as it is. I shall write to dear Lady Elizabeth, and relieve her mind as to her doubts of your suiting me. Your style pleases me very much, and I doubt not that you will do very well. I would ask you to come down some day while you are here; but you will easily understand that my position is such, as to oblige me to decline receiving any of the company. It would not do: I am sure you will see that; placed as I am, I could not, however highly I might respect you—"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Sheepcote," I interrupted, haughtily, "you are giving yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble, by explaining home arrangements with which I can have nothing at all to do. I never visit; if I did, I should choose that society which suited me best, without considering myself responsible for my choice to any body. This, I conclude, is what you do, like every one else, and certainly requires no explanation."

And thus we parted, mutually dissatisfied.

The next day the company all met for rehearsal. I had not seen a bill, and was agreeably surprised to hear a voice I knew, talking in the green-room. I went in, and found Mrs. Sheepcote and Mr. Alston.

"Good morning, Miss Sackville," said the lady, distantly.

"Miss Sackville!" said the gentleman cordially coming forward with outstretched hands, "what fortunate wind has blown you here? It seems an age since I saw you, though I have had the gratification of hearing of your success from our friend Mrs. Chace."

"You are very good to have kept me in your memory. When did you see Mrs. Chace last?"

"A month ago. Just before I left town she read to me a critique from a Cheltenham paper, and I assure you we congratulated ourselves upon our pupil."

"Miss Sackville, Mr. Alston," shouted the call-boy.

"Do you play Clemanthe?" asked Mr. Alston, as we went down together to the stage. "And are you engaged here for the season?"

"Yes, to both questions," I replied.

"I am glad of it. But if you have no particular wish to be worried and annoyed to death, try and get on better with your manageress; she is, without any one exception, in favour of ladies celebrated in history for such characteristics, the most detestable person I have the honor to know; and I warn you not to provoke her. She won't stab you, and she won't poison you, and so put you out of your misery at once; but she will tease, and thwart, and sneer at, and vex

you, in every feline way that she can. If you are a favorite, she will hate you for it; and if you are not, she will taunt you with it: she is perfect in the art of making other people's lives wretched. I have always believed in my secret soul, that hers flourished in old times in the form of a Familiar of the Inquisition."

"I am afraid then we shall not get on very well together. I suspected as much yesterday, when she attempted to patronize me in the most condescending manner."

"Attempted? it did not succeed then: you did not take it meekly?"

"No. I rebelled at once; and so decidedly, that I do not think she will honor me with any further notice."

"Let us hope so. I have often wondered how the experiment of setting her at defiance would answer: not at all, I am afraid; she has too much power. Nevertheless, I think if I were here for any length of time, I should try it; only to do it successfully, requires such perfect command of one's self—such utter blindness and deafness to all the proceedings of one's antagonist, that I am afraid I should, in a moment of extreme torment, throw up my indifference and come to open war. But hark! they are approaching my cue. What a grand play this is!"

"Yes, for Ion; but for no one else."

"Adrastus?"

As Mr. Alston had predicted, so it came to pass. Mrs. Sheepcote was very soon at variance, either covert or declared, with all the ladies, and most of the gentlemen of the company; exceptions only being made in favor of two old acquaintances whom she had brought from Bath, and to whom she was most gracious.

For some time my work was very light: I had been fortunate with the audience in a little farce-part, in which Mrs. Sheepcote considered herself unrivaled, and which she suddenly made over to me one evening on the plea of illness; and for many weeks she revenged herself for my success by shelving me.

This was very wretched: far more so than she could guess; for in work and action was my only rest.

No place is to me, even in happiness, so desolate as the sea; and now it was horrible. The restless, everlasting surge, the monotonous and lonely shore, the shrieking sea-birds, the barren sands, all (to my mind) contribute to make a residence at the sea-side the most forlorn of human habitations. Sunset or moonlight on the water, is grand and lovely; but, unlike all other beautiful things, it makes one shudder: it is the glory and grandeur of desolation. Sweeping on in their majestic indifference forever and forever, those mighty waves roll by, as if in disdain. Look upon the mightiest forest, the loftiest mountains, and there is some individuality: you can single out some one tree greater or less than the others, one hill in something different to its neighbors; but on the sea all is ceaseless, monotonous iteration. On it comes, sweeping, or roaring, or chafing, but with no separate point upon which you can rest your eye; no individual thing to watch or speculate upon: all are merged into one, and the immensity awes and repels. It is too grand, too mighty for human love or sympathy.

I never walked along the shore, therefore; it

made me miserable. Evening was my delight, for then the post came in, and brought me long, long letters from Essex, full of deep and ardent love; and reading them I was happy.

As usual, after a little time Mrs. Lyndon's active love found out some friends who were residing near Swansea, whose interest for me she thought it would be useful to bespeak; and the consequence was, that, to Mrs. Sheepcote's annoyance and jealousy, several of the "first families" in the neighborhood called at my poor little lodgings.

But at only one of these houses did I ever become very intimate, and that was one to which I have alluded before; Lily Bank, the residence of Colonel and Lady Frances Hastings: there I was at home. Gentle and refined, delicate and warm-hearted, this perfect lady was a zealous and true friend. She was one of those rare people whom you know at once; and knowing, can not choose but love: in whose kindly generous nature there is nothing to conceal, whose impulses and promptings are ever Christian-like and beautiful. Good, kind, gracious lady, may "the memory of the thousand kindnesses" which you lavished upon a sad and lonely girl in her dark and sorrowful days, cheer you like ministering angels when you need comfort!

At her first visit, Lady Frances discovered my love for flowers; and ever after, not a day went by that did not bring a basket of rich garden treasures from Lily Bank. Books, fruit, flowers, all that could adorn my little room, or gratify my taste, came lavishly. Often has her carriage stood a whole morning at the stage-door, waiting the conclusion of a long rehearsal, to take me a pleasant drive; and every Saturday she sent her own little pony phaeton to convey me to Lily Bank, that I might spend Sunday there, and go with her to church.

In all this, which then seemed the result of chance, I have since learned to perceive God's providence. He saw the trial that was coming, and with wonderful mercy and goodness, placed me where my principles would be strengthened, and I should be won, by admiration for my earthly teacher, to love and serve Him.

I had not been long at Swansea, when, to my great sorrow, Lady Frances was obliged to leave home for several days. She called upon me in her way out of town, and bade me consider Lily Bank as much at my service as ever: but that was impossible; and the darkness that seemed to close over my spirit when she was gone, no words or pen can describe.

Essex Temple's letters were now my sole comfort; and in reading them over and over again, I tried to quiet and satisfy my heart. Not a note that he had ever written, not a flower he had ever given to me was lost; and more dearly than ever a devotee prized the relics of his saint, did I value and cherish these little faded memorials of past happiness. But when this occupation was over; when one by one, and over and over again, I had read the words I knew by heart, and gazed upon the withered flowers, every rent in whose parched leaves was familiar to me, I had nothing left to do but to mourn and pine. And at last an impatient despair came over me, which prompted the most reckless and desperate deeds.

How I controlled it I do not know: the craving to go back to Cheltenham, to hear his voice

again, to look upon him, to listen to his footstep, was so strong, that it almost distracted me. Do what I would, occupy myself as I would, the impulse was ever upon me.

Ill-regulated and undisciplined as my mind was, he was its life, its sun, its one sole object of worship. And recalling those lone melancholy days, unoccupied save in reading his passionate and imploring letters, and dwelling upon the memory of the past, I wonder that I did not do some rash and evil thing. I was sorely tempted: "Lonely and desolate, my heart fainted within me." Day after day from morning until night, I was utterly alone: separated from all I loved, and all who loved me; with not one familiar face or voice to cheer, or bid me "God speed" in the strife. In a bare and poor lodging, with few of the necessities, and none of the comforts to which I had from infancy been accustomed; with all the stinging memories of past happiness, and the thought (so hard to bear) that mother, sister, lover and friends were happy, and free, and that I was alone, miserable, and in bondage; with no fixed principle, no religious trust, but only a vague foundationless idea or instinct to guide me; I do wonder that I stood firm. But the good seed which God had sown by stray and unconnected hands, the early but little-heeded lessons of my governess, the prayers and trials of Mrs. Trevelyan, the piety and patience of Lady Frances Hastings—to whom Providence had made me known, that the beauty of her example might strengthen and help me—were bearing fruit. Unknown and unseen by me then, but humbly and gratefully acknowledged since, God was working for me: it was no chance, no accident, which led me hither and thither, and threw me again with Mrs. Lyndon, and afterward with Lady Frances Hastings; but His Almighty and merciful will, the grace of a long-suffering and beneficent Providence.

The conflict between the strong impulse which urged me to return to Mrs. Mableton, and the half-recognized duty which forbade it, soon made me ill. And weary and unhappy, I wandered about day after day.

One evening—I shall never forget it—the post brought no letter. It was the first time I had been disappointed; and when my little handmaid, the landlady's sister, came up to tell me that the postman had gone by on the other side and shaken his head when she came to the door, my heart sank heavily, and I lay down again upon the sofa, subdued and silent.

Presently I was aroused by a slight bustle and talking below, and then a footstep ascending the stairs. I sprang up with a wild hope—it could not be—and yet—the footsteps came on and on, and then there was a tap at the door. I could not answer it; the beating of my heart nearly choked me—another tap, the door opened and Essex Temple stood in the entrance.

I did not move: I could not; my breath came gaspingly, and I steadied myself from falling, by leaning one hand heavily upon the table. He came forward hastily and in alarm, and took me in his arms, exclaiming,

"Florence, my own darling Florence, why have you done this? Why have you concealed your illness? Oh, if you had died!"

But death, illness, sorrow and weakness were now in the presence of their conqueror Love,

with his treasure of life and joy was come back, and would triumph over all.

Oh, the deep, unutterable happiness of that time. The sea-shore, hitherto so desolate and sad, was so no longer; but a fairy pleasaunce for sprites and sylphs to hold their revels in: even the steep barren mountain-walks grew lovely, and the narrow, dirty, awkward streets, looked beautiful as Venice. Oh, Love! thou mighty magician what wondrous transformations are thine.

"Miss Sackville sings like a bird, Fanny," said my little maiden one day to her sister, "her happiness seems running over."

And so it was. I was too happy; and the end was approaching.

CHAPTER LII.

My idleness did not last long after Essex came. Some one had told Mrs. Sheepcote of his visit; and knowing that now it would annoy me more to spend the mornings at rehearsal, the evenings in playing, and the nights in study, than to be shelved, she forthwith gave such directions as effectually prevented my spending much time at home. This mortified Essex exceedingly; he did not mind the work, because I laughed at it and did it; but he was stung beyond bearing to see that I was so thoroughly in another's power: that such a woman as Mrs. Sheepcote held me in thrall: that I was in fact a servant, with scarcely a single hour that I could call my own.

And this—perhaps, unconsciously—operated against me in his mind: I saw it afterward. He was not to blame: it was his nature. He was proud and jealous of his position in society, and had not moral courage to act independently: a sarcasm or slight maddened him. I have seen his face flush scarlet to the very roots of his hair, when a message has reached me requiring my attendance at the theatre, and I have been obliged to leave some occupation to go: he resented it as an indignity offered to himself. Many a time when we had spent a sunny hour on the shore, and returned gay and happy, jesting and conjuring up all sorts of whimsical fancies, he has suddenly grown cold and constrained at the salutation of a passer-by, and some such dialogue as the following, which I remember perfectly, would ensue:

"Who's that man, Florence?"

"What man? I saw nobody."

"That man who took off his hat to you."

"I don't know; I did not look."

"There, crossing the street."

"Oh, that's the low comedian."

"The low comedian? Good Heavens! Florence, how can you submit to such insolence? How dare he presume to recognize you?"

"Because, I dare say, he sees no difference between us."

"No difference!"

"No: to his mind there can not be much, since we are fellow-laborers in the same field."

At this moment a lady passed, staring rudely at me.

"Who's that Florence?"

"Mrs. Jenkin Davis, I believe, wife of an attorney here."

"Don't you know her? Does not she know who you are, that she stared so impertinently?"

"I have no doubt that she does."

"She pushed past you?"

"Yes."

"But why," he exclaimed, in a tone of great annoyance and irritation, "does nobody speak to you, Florence? This is horrible."

"Nobody speak to me! Oh, yes: Lady Frances Hastings, for instance; all the people I meet at Lily-bank."

"They patronize you."

"Some do, perhaps."

After such conversations as these, he was invariably moody, absent, and low-spirited: not rude or unkind, but silent and abstracted. If Lady Frances had been at home, and he could have seen the cordial, and even affectionate way in which she and her friends treated me, Essex Temple might have felt differently; as it was, his want of faith in the high tone of feeling of really well-bred, pure-minded persons, caused him to do them and me the injustice of supposing that I suffered similar impertinences from others, though less offensively shown.

But to return to the evening on which I had to play for the first time after his arrival. That he was very much annoyed by it, was evident; and to spare him further annoyance, I entreated, as a particular favor, that he would not enter the boxes to see the comedy. I was to perform a very mediocre part, disagreeable to myself and the audience, and I knew that he would be mortified: but seized with one of those perverse impulses to which he was subject, he persisted in his determination to go; and when the curtain rose I saw him the sole occupant of the stage-box.

I never played so ill: the part itself was a bad and ungrateful one; and the consciousness that his eye was upon me, and that I was appearing to so great disadvantage, overcame me entirely. I had neither nerve nor memory: little as it was that I had to say and do, I often absolutely forgot it all, and the prompter's voice was heard quite as frequently as mine.

When the play was over I was impatient to return home: a presentiment—one of those incomprehensible misgivings which so often torture, but fail to guide us—came over me, and made me restless and uneasy.

To my surprise, Essex did not come in. I waited, in anxious suspense, until it was too late to expect him, and then retired, to seek the rest I found it impossible to obtain.

Early the next morning, however, he came. He looked pale and ill; and after the first salutation, said,

"I must leave you to-day, Florence."

"To-day!" I repeated in amazement, gazing at him, in the hope of seeing the smile which should betray the jest.

"Yes, love, to-day. I had a letter from my mother last night; she is in Cheltenham, at my house, and expects me there: I must go."

And after some few more brief questions and replies, he sat beside me, on the sofa, his elbow resting on the table, and supporting his head on one hand, holding both mine (now cold as marble) with the other.

There was a long silence. The shock had bewildered me. Although at present I scarcely

understood or realized the impending calamity still I knew enough to feel that my happiness was once more departing from me. Yet, notwithstanding I suffered bitterly, I strove to conceal it and smile: but, alas! for the pride of woman, when her heart is breaking, her smile is like the momentary glare of lightning, over a scene of desolation.

I tried to speak, but my lips quivered, and in fear lest he should see it, I rose and went to the book-shelf; he followed.

"Why do you leave me, Florence? I shall not be here to-morrow."

I endeavored to make some commonplace reply, but the rising in my throat warned me to desist; so I went on, feigning to search for a book. But this seeming indifference did not deceive Essex; he knew as well, perhaps better than if I had spoken, how much I was enduring. And he was silent; watching me, and my trembling hands and averted face, as I pretended to put the books in order: strange order that, which consisted in placing tall and short, first and fourth volumes together.

"You can not do it," he said, quietly at last.

The book I held fell from my grasp; he picked it up, and taking both my hands, turned me gently from the shelf, and stood before me. I did not look up, but I felt my color come and go, and my breath falter: I was undergoing the torture. At this critical moment, a visiter in the shape of the stage-manager was announced, and Essex, uttering an impatient exclamation, took up his hat and left the room.

I have not the least idea of what Mr. Shaw's mission was: I remember that as he talked, I tried to attend, and to think of what he was saying; but in vain.

At last he went, and Essex returned. The coach left the town at six o'clock: and although no allusion was made to this, we could neither talk nor read, nor settle to any occupation. I brought some work, and endeavored to sew; but after a while the needle fell with my hands upon my knee, and I gazed vacantly and unconsciously from the window.

In this way the afternoon passed, until at last the mail-horn blew loudly as the coach rattled by, and we knew that it was five o'clock. Only one hour more, and the Cheltenham mail would leave. My look of dismay brought Essex to my side.

"What frightened you, dearest?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! why are you so pale, then; and why are your hands so cold, and your eyes so sad? You are thinking of me, dearest, and that in an hour's time I shall be going miles away. Is it not so?"

I looked up. His eyes, full of a love too deep for words, gazed into mine.

"Florence. I can not leave you!" he exclaimed, impetuously. "You shall not stay here, torturing yourself and me to death. Come back to Cheltenham; or, if you like it better, we will go abroad: any thing sooner than part."

"It is impossible," I said.

"Why, why? Nothing binds you to this hateful life, but care for your mother. Take my purse, or direct a settlement, or do what you will: give her half I possess, only leave this detestable existence."

It was a hard trial: none can know *how* hard, unless they have stood in the same position. Slavery, loneliness, and poverty, stood contrasted with liberty, love, and affluence. I was free to choose either; while the voice I loved dearest on earth urged me passionately.

"Come, dearest, come!" he said, in those rich, low tones which are so dangerous; "do not hesitate. No one shall know; you shall never have reason to repent your trust. Come, dearest."

What more he said, I do not know. A new light had broken in upon me, and I was paralyzed. I heard him speak; and horrible words, distinct and treacherous as the serpent's of old, came every now and then clearly to my senses: but I was stunned, and for many minutes had neither sense nor voice to answer.

He misunderstood my silence, thinking it implied consent; and drawing me close to him, he spoke some passionate words of thanks. But the shock was over then: my reason had returned, and I had courage and strength to look at him sorrowfully and reproachfully, and to withdraw from his embrace.

"And is it possible," I said, as calmly as I could, "that you should do this? that you, whom I have so loved, so trusted, should have entertained this vile thought against me—have done me this bitter, bitter wrong?"

My hands involuntarily clasped each other tightly, with intense anguish, and I felt as if my senses were leaving me.

He spoke again, but I interrupted him,

"Do not speak! Do not justify yourself! Say not one word more, but let us part at once."

Again he endeavored to soothe and urge me.

"Oh, what have I done?" I exclaimed, passionately, "to merit this? What have you seen in me to give you warrant thus to insult and torture me? Why have you deceived me?"

"My family—" he began.

"Name them not: dare not to utter their names in my presence," I interrupted, impetuously. "Do not make them an excuse for your dishonor; for if they love you, they would rather see you dead, than know you for what this hour has proved you to be. Nay, do not speak; do not crush yourself with a heavier weight of falsehood and treachery; but go, and never again dare to think that God and His angels desert the poor and the desolate, when forsaken by the world and fortune. Go! and, if you can, forgive yourself."

"Florence! I entreat you to listen—"

"Not to a word: unless it be one of repentance."

"Circumstances—"

"Silence! pray, pray, be silent; do not, for the sake of my future thoughts of you, degrade yourself lower than you have already fallen. Do not make me despise myself, for having loved one so utterly unworthy."

"You are going too far," he said, angrily. "You can not cast me off: you have no more power to hate and scorn me than you have to forget. Then be reasonable, Florence, and merciful to yourself. You know how I love you; you know that, with one exception, there is not the thing on earth that you could wish or ask for, that I would not do for you. And beautiful, excellent, adored as you are, you know that your present position—"

He stopped. It was an awkward pause.

"Go on," I said, quietly.

"No, I will not; I can not. Oh! Florence, do not compel me to excuse myself by finding words for a truth, which your own experience must have taught you. Hear me, Florence; listen to me;" and he knelt, and tried to take my hand. "I love you beyond all other earthly beings; better than my very existence. To give you pleasure, I would sacrifice every thing—life itself, and all its joys and hopes—and think myself well repaid, so you were happy; but I can not destroy my parents: while they live I can not give you the name it would be my pride that you should bear. But when they are gone—oh, Florence! dearest, dearest Florence! only trust me till then; and all that you can ask, or dictate for yourself, shall be done. Only trust me now: think what you will suffer if you send me from you. You have acknowledged that you love me; think of the lonely, wretched hours that you will pass when I am gone; without hope or aim, with nothing to cheer you, nothing to live for; and knowing that, miserable as you are, you have doomed one who loved you better than his life, to tenfold your wretchedness and despair. Oh, Florence! have pity upon us both."

I did not answer for a moment, but I covered my face with my hands, and tried to collect my thoughts and energies. Presently I crossed the room. He sprang to his feet, and followed me.

"Where are you going?"

"To my own room for a few minutes. Do not detain me; it will be better for your cause: let me go." And with firm though gentle force, I released my hand from his, and passing through the door, entered the adjoining room.

Once there, alone and quiet, all the specious arguments he had ever used, all the sophistry I had ever heard—the dreary and desolate future, and my deep and abiding love for him—rose up to tempt and beguile me. False spirits ministering to their fiendish master whispered and tempted me, contrasting my present weary toil-laden life, with the bright future of love and happiness they promised. "You are deserted and alone," they urged; "wearing out life and health for those who will never thank or love you. You are already belied by the world, and forgotten by your friends; neglected by your mother, and undervalued by every body. Why, then, should you hesitate? Nothing that you suffer now, can be made worse by any step; but may be better. Trust him, Florence! He loves you too well to deceive you. No one else loves you: no one ever did."

At that moment, across the soft autumn air, came a sweet fragrance of roses. There were no flowers in the room, and no garden near; but there, floating round me, as strong as if I had stood in a summer bower, was the scent of roses. Whence did it come? God's angel knows.

Oh, the memories that scents, like sounds, awaken! In a moment I was back at Ingerdine again; a child, and ill. I was in the paneled nursery, lying upon the chintz-curtained bed, watching my mother glide about with her untiring energy, like a ministering spirit, and listening to her clear, musical voice, cheering and encouraging me. The perfume of roses was coming in through the open window, and from a freshly gathered bunch which she had laid up

my pillow. No living, breathing shape, no actual sight could have been more palpable than that memory. That illness, my mother's tender self-denying care, her watchfulness and patience, with all I owed her for it, returned; the gratitude I had felt, the resolution I had made to repay it to her some day, all rushed upon my thoughts again—and these memories saved me. The time was come to prove my gratitude: to show that it had not been an impulse dying out as soon as awakened; and my heart recognized the claim. The right thought, once listened to, awakened others; and an over-ruling Providence aided the struggle. Back on my memory came recollections of Mrs. Trevelyan and Milly—visions of their solemn death-beds; words of warning long forgotten, rose into life again, and pleaded with me. Good thoughts, holy resolutions, prompted by those blessed spirits who smile upon and aid us in our battle against their enemy and ours, followed fast and faster. A little time, a very little time, and the victory was gained.

I rose steadily, without passion, or excitement, but with a calm determination. I knew what I was giving up, and made the sacrifice deliberately. I took pen and paper and wrote:

"I can not see you again. From this moment all must be over between us. Do not attempt to see me: it will be useless. I am resolved to follow the course I have marked out; therefore I entreat you to spare me and yourself the pain of another interview. When you receive this note I shall have left the house for Lily-bank. Under the protection of Lady Frances Hastings I shall be safe from any further insult. May God forgive you, as I do."

From the room I was then in, there descended some few old stairs, into the little kitchen. To the top of these I went, and calling gently, was answered by my usual handmaid.

"I am going to Lily-bank, directly: can you accompany me?" I asked in a whisper. "It is late, and I do not like to go alone."

"Yes, oh, yes! I shall like the walk so much," replied the child, eagerly; "but Mr. Temple is in your parlor: don't you know?"

"Yes."

"But isn't he going? won't he wonder?"

"No. Make haste, Fanny; and put on your bonnet, and ask your sister to come to me."

Without any explanation I gave the letter I had written to my landlady, desiring her not to deliver it until I was gone. She asked no questions, did not even look any; she was a patient and sorrow-stricken woman, to whom the sight of a pale sad face spoke a sufficiently intelligible language. She saw that I was suffering, and she had the rare delicacy to be silent.

Lady Frances Hastings was not at home: she had not yet returned from her visit; but the colonel's favorite niece was there as usual, and she welcomed me as her aunt would have done.

"You are come to spend the evening and night here?" she said, greeting; "how kind of you to think of my loneliness. My uncle only left me this morning, and I heard that you had a visitor."

"I had. I am alone now."

Mrs. Lesley looked pityingly at me for a moment, then took my hand again, and pressed it *between both her own*, and simply saying,

"*You will like to be quiet after your walk,*" left me.

During the evening, as we sat together, a note was brought to me. It was from Essex; full of complaint and upbraiding: he had not left Swansea, he said; nor would he do so without seeing me again. I wrote a few words in reply; calm, firm, and unrelenting. I had taken the first step in renunciation; and mighty hands led me on in the path.

The next day Fanny brought me a summons from the theatre; and I then learned that he was gone.

CHAPTER LII.

DAILY bread—daily bread: oh, the strife and toil, heart-misery and immolation, that weary creatures pass through to gain it! Oh, those horrible theatre walls, and all the false glitter, and reckless folly which they contained. If I could have shut out forever the pure day-light of the fair outer world, no wonder that I detested the glare and deception of the theatre.

Yet I went on; daily needs must be supplied by daily work: and the labors of those who work for bread, can know no intermission.

And well for me it was so. It is always well when God makes hourly trials work out his will; and it was especially well for me. I knew that I had done right; still I was most wretched. I knew that if the temptation came again I should do the same; for beseeching letters came with every post, and still I was inflexible: but yet I was most unhappy. Peace had not come in the train of duty; and I did not then know, that except to the well-disciplined and holy-minded, it seldom does come at first.

One thing, too, which made my sorrow hard to bear, was, that I was shut out from sympathy: I could not speak of it. It would have humbled me to the dust to suppose that any human being knew of the deep degradation and insult which had fallen upon me: no, I must bear alone.

Weeks passed on and summer went. The season was drawing to its close when I must go forth again. But this time I was under no apprehension: I had closed a very satisfactory engagement at Bristol for the winter, and the few intervening weeks after the Swansea theatre closed, I arranged to go as a "star" to Monmouth. The duties of this last engagement were to be very easy: I was only to play three nights a week, never to half-price, and not to be required to study; added to all which, I was to have a free benefit.

My benefit at Swansea was, thanks to Lady Frances, very successful: I gained fifty pounds; which I transmitted immediately to my mother at Croydon.

My professional prospects were now excellent: I was a favorite with the audience, and with the critics. But my popularity entailed on me the great and perpetual annoyance of anonymous declarations of eternal love, conveyed through the post; presents of rings, brooches, and flowers, sent through the same channel; verses in the paper, addressed to "Miss S—," in the character of Juliet, and a variety of small absurdities, which made the perpetrators ridiculous, and me uncomfortable.

One quiet week at Lily-bank, with its good and kind mistress, after the theatre closed, and then, like the fabled wanderer who can find no rest, I set forth again.

It was night when I reached Monmouth: a beautiful October night—clear, starry, and cold; and the drive through from Chepstow enchanted me.

Fortunately, the people of the inn were kind and civil, and, seeing how ill and spiritless I looked, willingly exerted themselves to find apartments for me; so that the next day after my arrival in Monmouth, I was, without any trouble of my own, established in two pretty quiet rooms, in the house of a respectable tradesman.

The little bustle of settling once over; the necessary boxes unpacked, books got out, and drawers arranged, I sat down once more in a new place, unoccupied and alone. The weather was lovely, but I had no spirits to walk; and having nothing to study, and very little work to do, the days passed on in gloomy monotony—that wretched state which, sooner than any other, with impetuous natures like mine, wears out the heart of life.

However, this had lasted little more than a week, when my solitude was broken in upon, by a family named Lloyd; a name perfectly new to me. Before I had time to task my recollection, Mrs. Lloyd explained her visit, by saying, that the previous day, she had received a letter from Lady Frances Hastings, to whom she was slightly known, bespeaking her good offices and kindness for me.

“And the very cordial terms in which her ladyship writes,” continued Mrs. Lloyd, “induced me to call at once, and beg you, if not better engaged, to return with us to Croft-y-bulla, and spend the day. We have some people coming to dinner, whom it may be as well that you should know; therefore, if you can excuse this unceremonious invitation, do oblige us, and come. We will bring you back to-morrow, in time for any business you may have.”

Thus kindly urged, I did at last consent to go; although the effort was painful, and the very exertion of talking almost more than I could bear. But the frank cordiality of Mrs. Lloyd and her daughters, the nice tact and good taste of their entreaties, and the evident wish they had that I should yield to them, were irresistible: I felt it would be ungracious to refuse.

To Croft-y-bulla, therefore, I went, to spend a pleasant day, and to find that, in securing for me the friendship and society of this hospitable and amiable family, Lady Frances Hastings had done me a kind service.

Under their guidance I saw all the beauties of the county: Tintern, Ragland, Chepstow, the Wynd-cliff, and every other object of attraction, were made in turn the object of some pleasant expedition; and many brilliant moonlight evenings were spent in the Lloyd's own boat upon the Wye.

Certainly there is no place to which my wandering fortunes ever led me, that holds a greener place in my memory than Monmouth. Thanks to Lady Frances, Mrs. Lloyd was informed of my history; and the good Welsh people, once satisfied that I was working for a legitimate end, were most cordial to me. Truly,

“There is goodness, like wild honey, hived
In remote nooks and corners of the world.”

But despite all their kindness, I was very miserable. Every thing had become toilsome to me. No occupation, no amusement, could win my thoughts from the past; no hope light up the future; and the days wore on cheerless and sad. He who had lent magic to life, and beauty to every thing—in whom love, and joy, and happiness were centred—had proved worthless, treacherous, and false. I could not think of him without pain; and yet, infatuated as I was, I could not help loving him.

With all this sorrow on my mind, it was not surprising that I became so wan and lifeless, that people began to speculate upon the probable length of my life, and to predict an early death from consumption. But they were wrong. Grief seldom kills: it is like the fruit-worm, which eats away the heart and strength of the berry, yet leaves it hanging on the tree.

The seven weeks of my engagement passed quickly; and if I had been happy, it would have been a pleasant time; for every body was kind, and I had little to do: but as it was, it was only seven weeks a degree less heavy, than those bitter ones which had preceded it.

My benefit, under the patronage of the county members (obtained for me by Mr. Lloyd), was very successful. In most cases, tickets were exchanged for sovereigns; in many for notes. The house was quite full; and at the request of the audience, conveyed to me through Mr. Lloyd, I played in every piece. The clear receipts of the night amounted to a hundred and twenty pounds; one hundred of which I sent to my mother, and the rest I retained for the improvement of my wardrobe.

But the pleasure which this great success gave me, was absolutely nothing, compared to the joy with which, upon the day following my benefit, I perused this letter from Mr. Lyle.

“MY DEAR CHILD FLORENCE—I am almost paralyzed with the terrible news which has only just reached me. Can it be true what I hear? Are you, my pet and darling, indeed upon the stage? I can not believe it: and yet, knowing you as I do—your brave good heart, your courage and sense of duty—I may not disbelieve it. But, if it is so, what with your disposition must you not have undergone?—a living death. I shudder and tremble as I think of it.

“My poor, poor child! little did I think, in my selfishness, in what sorrows and struggles my cruel refusal to listen to your generous pleadings for your family, would involve you. Such a fearful thing as this which has come to pass, never entered my thoughts: for how could I fancy my delicate, proud-hearted Flory an actress? Oh, my child! my heart breaks while I think of it.

“I would fain come to you; but alas! I am only now recovering from a lingering illness, which has kept me here for many months, and which even yet refuses me the power to walk. But I am promised that in a very little time, no relapse occurring, I shall be able to travel; and then, with God's good blessing, I will come to you.

“Meanwhile, Flory, you must have instant help; and for this purpose go to London and

present the inclosed letter to my lawyer, whose address it bears. It contains full directions to him to serve you in all things, as he would have done my poor lost child; so that when I reach England I may have the joy of finding you free and happy, as you always ought to have been: and as, but for my obstinacy, you would have been. And for my share in this bad business, for all that my cruelty has caused you to suffer, forgive me, Florence! although I can never forgive myself; for how can I hope that you will trust my love and care again, when the want of it has cast you into all this misery. Of all of us who have talked and professed so much, you have been the only one whose deeds have borne out the spoken words, and who has sacrificed pride and ease, and self, for others.

"My child, my child! you shame us all; and me the most. But, by God's grace, your trial is past; and in proportion as your purity and truth have carried out the holy motives which placed you where you are, will be your peace, and joy, and satisfaction now.

"For a short time, farewell. Do not delay to present this letter; and write to me that you have done so. Believe me ever, dearest Flory,

"Your affectionate friend,

HORACE LYLE."

Oh the ecstasy of joy with which I read and re-read this blessed letter; and it was not until I had done so at least half a dozen times, that I perceived it bore no address, and contained no inclosure. When I discovered this, my joy was slightly damped: but only slightly; for I felt certain that both had been forgotten in the hurry of writing and sealing, and that Mr. Lyle would soon remedy the first omission: for the rest I did not care, as, had he sent twenty letters, I would not have presented one until his return.

What a new aspect things bore now: from Mr. Lyle, with his new feelings toward my family, I would joyfully accept such assistance as might aid me in supporting them in some other way than this hateful life that I was following now. No pride, no delicacy, no propriety could be outraged, or even offended, by taking help from this dear old friend; and the hope of speedy release made my heart bound with joy. To be free—free from the trammels which had brought my late deep suffering upon me—free from covert insolence and open tyranny—would be bliss indeed.

During the first transports of joy, I paced my little room impatiently, as if longing to fly away and tell the happy tidings to those who loved me. Lady Frances, dear Lady Frances—how glad she would be! and Mrs. Lyndon, and Mrs. Mableton. How could I be content to stay here, keeping all this exceeding happiness to myself?

But after a time, when I had spent many hours alone, and found by experience that it was possible to live without imparting my joy, I became calmer and wiser; and by the light of sober reason—a very new acquaintance of mine—I determined not even to write at all on the subject to any one, but to go on fulfilling the engagements I had made, and do my duty to the last.

I am afraid that in this resolution, which sounds so well to read, there were, notwithstanding the wise and just thoughts which I have related, some less pure and holy ones. Glad and thank-

ful as I should truly be to escape from the thrall-dom in which I was now held, and readily as I would accept Mr. Lyle's aid to do so, it must be offered otherwise than in the shape of a letter to his agent. I would not have him think so poorly of me as that I seized upon the first opportunity of escape, and that I was so mean of spirit as to throw myself and family, with the eager haste of a willing dependent, upon him, the moment I had power to do so. No; I would wait and work where I was. If Mr. Lyle's love and purpose were as sincere as I was sure they were, his absence would not be long; and I would wait.

How much had pride—the nobler sort of pride, perhaps—the pride of independence—to do with this! But all human motives are mixed: nothing is so good or evil as it seems. And if, in what I did then, my motives seemed purer than they were, I may be forgiven in consideration of the continual toil and suffering my resolution entailed. Besides, if conscience sometimes misgave me, whispering that pride was my counselor, reason also reminded me that I knew neither Mr. Lyle's address, nor that of his agent; and that therefore, even if I would, I could do nothing. I must wait.

A few days after the receipt of this letter, I parted from my kind Monmouth friends with very great regret. But the Bristol theatre was to open on New Year's day; and, as it was now the last Monday in December, I dared not delay longer.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE first annoyance that I met with in my new engagement, was the refusal of Mr. Hunt, the tragedian, to play with me. I was tall and he was very short, and being painfully sensitive upon the point, he could not endure the idea of the comparison that would be made. I was to have played Desdemona to his Othello, Pauline to his Claude, Cordelia to his Lear; but he told Mrs. M'Cleverty, the manageress, that if the arrangement was persisted in, he should decline to enter into terms with her.

"I shall not play with a May-pole," he said, decisively and civilly at the close of the conversation.

Poor, good-hearted, eccentric Mrs. M'Cleverty was in great distress; what to do, she did not know; how to keep Mr. Hunt, and avoid offending me, was a difficulty she saw no hope of surmounting.

Fortunately, I guessed somewhat of the truth, and went to her at once to inquire. I knew that several very bad weeks had seriously embarrassed her; that she depended upon this visit of Mr. Hunt's to relieve her from much inconvenience, and that any obstacle thrown in the way would be material. In her odd way she had been very kind to me, very liberal, and very indulgent; and, although I disliked this arrogant tragedian exceedingly, and should not have grieved over any mortification that might have fallen to him, I could not forget Mrs. M'Cleverty's kindness, nor be ungrateful for it; so as soon as I understood how matters were, I said,

"Well, then, make any arrangements that will conciliate Mr. Hunt, and benefit you. As

far as I am concerned, I am perfectly willing to be left out of the bills until his engagement has closed; or to play a subordinate part."

"But do you really mean it, my dear?" asked Mrs. McCleverty, looking at me with the greatest astonishment; such a proposal as mine being unheard of in theatrical circles.

"Certainly I do. Now and ever, I hope that I shall always be more ready to aid than to thwart you. Besides," I added, seeing that her eyes filled with grateful tears at this unusual declaration, "I shall very often require indulgencies from you; and it is only politic to lay you under an obligation now."

"God bless you, my dear!" said the eccentric old lady, wringing my hand, and allowing the tears to fall down her lined and care-worn face. "God bless you for a good and grateful girl! I shall not forget this day, you may depend upon it."

And she did not; for ever after, while I was under her management, she made my duties light and pleasant; so that, if I had not detested the profession as I did, I must have been comfortable.

But every day increased my aversion to the stage, and my anxiety to leave it; and (strange contradiction!) the more kindness I received, the more disgusted I became. I felt that I ought to be more reconciled to my lot; and the inability to become so, added anger against myself to my other feelings of mortification. Besides, I had now become unsettled and restless. Ever since the receipt of Mr. Lyle's letter I had been anxious and uneasy, pining for letters, and counting the lagging hours as they passed; I could no longer work with the same stern concentration of purpose that I had done. I feared to go out, lest he for whom I watched should come in my absence; and hurried home, after any necessary absence, with an eager, hopeful heart, which often sickened from intensity of emotion.

In this state of mind, it can not be supposed that my pursuits, always distasteful to me, became any more welcome; or that the praise and applause I gained in them was of any value. Having before me the hope of freedom, I had lost the only reason for courting success; I was so soon to be free, independent of applause or blame, that they became of no consequence; there was no need to care about them.

But as day after day, and week after week, crept on, and brought no letter, and no visitor, I began to fear lest my bright hopes would fail, and that my dear old friend was dead. And the more I pondered on his silence, the more I became assured it was caused by nothing less than his death. If he were worse, or had experienced a relapse, he would surely have authorized some one about him to write to me, and relieve the anxiety he must have known that I was feeling. If he were well, or better, he would be here.

He, so good and thoughtful, so tender and kind, who had written the instant my position had become known to him, was not likely to keep me in the tortures of suspense, exciting my hopes and then destroying them. He must be aware, by this time, that I had not presented the letter which he had written; in all probability he had found it on his desk after mine was gone. My silence, then, could not have angered him; besides, if it had, he was too just to have thrown

me off without giving me an opportunity of justification. No; it was plain he was dead.

How shall I describe the utter misery and desolation of heart which came over my spirit as this truth forced itself upon me! Never, till they were destroyed, did I know how deep and sure had been the dependence upon the hopes Mr. Lyle's letter had awakened; it was left for their destruction to reveal how thoroughly I had relied upon and cherished them.

Weary, weary, sadder and more hopeless than ever, were my days now, with their ceaseless and exacting duties. Following so closely upon my former grief, this new one found me strengthless and desponding; utterly unable to cope with and conquer it.

My only aim now, was to work on harder than ever, and thus sooner to emancipate myself. And with this aim grew a feverish anxiety and impatience—a craving to be always at work; almost an anger that I could do no more; that each day could do but its own appointed tasks. In this wild impatience, I would have undertaken any labors, however great, to expedite my object.

Just as this feeling was at its height, I received a letter from Mr. Cost, offering me an engagement in America for three years, at a progressive salary; the rate of the first twelve months being rather more than double what I was receiving at Bristol, with one benefit in each season, and various other privileges.

Here was at once an opportunity of carrying out my wishes; and after a few hours reflection, to shape my thoughts intelligibly, I wrote to Lady Frances Hastings requesting her advice, and begging her to inquire, from her solicitor, what sum it would be requisite for me to save, in order to purchase a moderate annuity for my mother and Helen. It struck me, that with great economy, and fair average success, I might in these three years realize sufficient to accomplish so desirable an end, and thus earn my own release from the stage.

In a few days I received an answer, which determined me to accept Mr. Cost's offer; and, accordingly, I prepared to leave England in the *Great Western* steamer, which at that time lay below Bristol.

I then wrote to my mother, informing her of my plans, and promising to visit her at Brighton (she had left Croydon) as soon after the close of the Bristol theatre as I could. I wrote also to Mrs. Lyndon, Mrs. Spencer—to the last of whom I had not previously written since I had become an actress—and to Mrs. Chace.

Of the voyage, and my subsequent exile, I did not allow myself to think. A fear of the sea, and absurd dislike to America, are among the strongest feelings of which I am conscious; but once having decided that it was right to go, I resolutely refused myself the questionable solace of musing upon it. It is always unwise to dwell upon an approaching sorrow which one can not avert; no good purpose is ever answered by it; and much evil is often done. Besides that, in this instance, the evil had its counterbalancing good, in the opening it offered for the accomplishment of my cherished hopes.

In due time, replies to most of my letters came. Happily, all were satisfactory; and, after a short space, I began to make preparations for my voyage and sojourn in a strange land.

Accompanied by Mrs. McCleverty, whose experience and kindness were extremely valuable, I went down to the *Great Western* and secured my berth; sent to Birmingham for some stage jewelry, and made as many professional purchases as my funds admitted: but they were soon reduced to a very low ebb, and before I had nearly replenished my wardrobe, I was obliged to relinquish the idea of further additions, until an indefinite future.

This, I am ashamed to say, rather annoyed me. Having a fastidious sense of the fitness of things, I especially disliked the idea of wearing muslin as Desdemona, or Lady Macbeth's velvet as Lady Teazle. However, as the vessel was not to leave England until August, and it was now only February, and my benefit was yet to come, I reconciled myself to the insufficiency of my purchases, in the hope that some short engagement like that at Monmouth might enable me to extend them.

Thanks to Mrs. McCleverty, this desirable event speedily occurred. As soon as she divined my wishes, and without apprising me of her intention, she wrote in so complimentary a strain to Mr. Hill, the manager of the Norwich theatre, as induced him to offer me handsome terms for the weeks of the spring and summer assizes; and thus I was relieved at once of all apprehensions on the subject of a scanty outfit.

My benefit at Bristol was poor, compared with those at Monmouth and Swansea; still, I was enabled to send a small sum to my mother; which, under existing circumstances, was very satisfactory.

When I reached Norwich, what was my astonishment at seeing, upon entering the town, immense white posting-bills placarded on the walls, announcing in great red and blue letters the appearance of "Miss Sackville, of the Theatres Royal New York and Philadelphia." Before I had recovered my surprise and dismay, the coach stopped at the hotel, and I alighted.

There was some slight delay in finding a dressing case, and consequently I remained in the hall while the front and hind boots were searched. Several trunks marked with my name, as passenger to Norwich, lay about, and soon betrayed me to the landlord, waiters, and loiterers. An immense placard hung in the bar; and, through a glass which was suspended opposite, I caught the telegraphic signals which connected me with its announcement.

In a few minutes, the news of my arrival became known throughout the hotel, and I found myself the centre of attraction; while on turning hastily to go up stairs, hoping to escape the half-audible observations of which I was the subject, I almost laughed to find the story of Thaddeus of Warsaw realized; and that, trusting to my supposed ignorance of English customs, I was marching through a double file of servants, each anxious for a peep at the American! What their ideas of such a natural curiosity were, may be guessed from the universal comment, and accompanying look of disappointment with which they watched, followed, and heard me speak.

"Why, la! she talks like us: she's just like an English woman."

Vexed as I was at the singular use Mr. Hill had made of Mrs. McCleverty's information respecting my American engagement, and the

scarcely justifiable manner in which he had perverted it, I could not help being amused at the odd things the inn people did that night, for the purpose of getting a peep at me. If I had been a talking kangaroo, or a real live fairy, they could not have shown more anxiety, nor have set the usual forms of behavior more ridiculously at defiance.

Early the next morning Mr. Hill called, and after taking my remonstrance in his usual nonchalant manner, proceeded to inform me that, owing to some mistake of his own in writing to me, I had arrived a fortnight too soon. There were, however, two very important nights in this fortnight, he said, which would enable him to offer me terms; but at a little lower rate than the assize weeks, certainly.

At first I was very angry at this deception—for deception it evidently was—and threatened to break off the engagement altogether. But the reflection of how much time and money would be wasted by such a step, deterred me; so, upon Mr. Hill's proposal to pay me equally for the three weeks, I consented to remain.

The first evening I played was to the bespeak of the county members, and the house was full to overflowing. The pieces were, "The Wife," an Interlude, and "Perfection;" in the first and last of which I appeared. Whether I really acquitted myself well, or whether the applause was only a kindly welcome to one whom they imagined on foreign shores, I do not know; but it was enthusiastic, and upon the fall of the curtain, after both the play and farce, I was called before it to make my courtesy to the audience.

The passages and wings were crowded with men from the front, and Mr. Hill was in a fever of delight. With the greatest zeal, he would have introduced people to me all night; but I disappointed his kind intentions in my favor, by taking instant refuge in the dressing-room, as soon as my scenes were over.

CHAPTER LV.

THE first week of this engagement had just closed, when, upon my return from rehearsal one morning, the servant met me, as I entered the house, with the strange information that there was a "soldier gentleman in the drawing-room, who wanted to see me."

Rather surprised by this intelligence, and speculating upon some impertinence in the shape of a visitor from the barracks, I walked slowly up-stairs, and, without removing my bonnet, entered the room. The gentleman was leaning out of the window, his cap and gloves were distributed upon the floor and table, and a great dog was beside him with his paws upon a chair. The noise of the closing door caused him to turn suddenly, and springing forward with a bound, he seized my hands, exclaiming,

"Flor! dear Flor!"

It was my cousin Philip.

"Come here, Flor; come here to the window, and let me look at you," he said, after the first exclamations and greetings were over. "How you are grown—what a tall girl you are! I don't know how it is, but I fancied I should

find you just the same as I left you at Ingerdyne years ago; and, instead, here you are a woman. I don't think I like it; but I'm not sure yet: I'll tell you presently. And now sit down—there, where the light falls on you, as it used to do in the old bower—and tell me all about yourself: all but this villainous stage work—that you must leave at once—and every thing that has happened.

"Only fancy, I never knew that you had left Ingerdyne, until I arrived in England with my regiment, four days ago. By mere accident I met an H—shire man at our mess, the first night, who told me; and ever since I have been engaged in finding you out.

"But what on earth, Flor., induced you to take to this horrid acting? Why didn't you write to me? I'd have sold my commission, sooner than you should have stooped so low. What is it all about? Tell me every thing."

"There is nothing to tell, Philip, more than you know; since you know that we have left dear old Ingerdyne, and that I am here."

"But why did you leave? I don't know that yet."

"There was a good deal of extravagance, some mismanagement and negligence, and eventually a sale; and the place was given up to the mortgagees. We left, of course: we had no money, we could not live on air, and I am here. Now, you know all."

"Not quite," he said, his eyes flashing. "Where's your father?"

"I do not know."

He muttered something I did not choose to hear, between his teeth, and then asked,

"Where is your mother? You had a sister, too: are they dead?"

"No, they are at Brighton."

"Acting too?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There is no necessity."

"Why, are they rich? Why then don't you live with them?"

"How absurd you are, Philip: don't ask any more questions, but tell me about yourself. Where have you been since you wrote to us last? You were in Madras then."

"Yes; but first—before I tell you any thing—I must know all about you. I did not come here to be put off in this way, Flor. I am the nearest relation you have, and now I am come back, I do not mean to let you either kill yourself or be killed, for or by any body else. So be a dear darling coz, as you used to be, and tell me every thing."

Accordingly I related all that had occurred since we parted, and when I had concluded my tale, he said,

"Very well: I understand. I don't want to hear any more: I know it all now. And now talk nonsense, any thing, so that you do talk; and I will tell you to-morrow what is to be done. Don't move, Flor., don't move; I like to look at you there. You remind me of those happy days when we were at Ingerdyne. Oh, Flor! how could you be so miserable, and not think of me? Why didn't you write to me, and tell me you wanted money? I'd have come from the world's end to give it you. But you never loved me *half* so much as I loved you."

After this, he fell into a reverie: at last he started up, saying,

"How long will it be before you can leave this place, Flor.? And what will these people think, seeing me here? You have no gentlemen visitors."

"No; but how do you know it?"

"I am sure of it," he answered, proudly. "My grandfather's loyal blood is pledge sufficient for his children."

"A poor pledge, Phil., if that were the only one."

"How? it is greater to me than any bond on earth. Loyal deeds are the heritage of those who bear such old names as his: it is their birth-right; and they dare not, if they would, sully or forget it. True birth, the right to follow loyal ancestors, is with me a pledge for honor."

"Very chivalrous, Phil., and worthy of a soldier; but not very safe as a principle, I think. I would rather have a higher one."

"Higher! what on this earth *can* be higher!"

"On earth, nothing perhaps."

"Then, what do you mean? Flor., you are a riddle: here have your eyes been flashing and your face burning, while you told me the events of the last few months; you have talked of indignities with the scorn of an empress, and flung back hard deeds with the disdain they merited; over and over again your lip has curled at the memory of some insolent patronage and condescension; and you have wondered how such people dared treat you so—you, the grandchild of one of the noblest old men in England; whose ancestors held lands and honors in their own homes before the Norman came, and who would not have mingled his race with theirs, to save both from destruction. And now you talk of higher pledges for faith and loyalty than such honorable birth! What do you mean?"

"Nothing, I daresay, Phil.; for unhappily I am to the full as proud as you are: prouder I sometimes fear, than ever. I do glory in my old name; and, poor as I am, I would not change it for the wealth of all the trade of England. But I know that I am wrong. I know that I carry a right feeling too far: so far, that right becomes wrong, and I who foster it, ridiculous. But, alas! I can not help it yet: the prejudices of my whole life (nay, Phil., do not curl your lip so) are not easily corrected. In poverty, insolence, and suffering, I have gloried to think, that, rich as my tormentors often were, I owned that, which all their wealth and new-born rank and mushroom honors were powerless to buy. I have nursed this pride, as mothers do elf children; and in my need have found, as they do, my nursing false, and myself defenceless. But still, with all this knowledge and experience, I go on the same: I am not humbled yet."

"Heaven grant you never may be!"

"Nay, Philip, do not say so. I have been sorely tried, and this pride did not help me then; it rather barbed the arrow, and poisoned the wound."

During the afternoon, I learned Philip's history since we had parted: not continuously though, only by piecemeal; for he seemed averse to talk of himself, and only did so apropos of something else. But in this way I learned that Sir Hugh Danvers was dead, having left Philip a handsome fortune; that he had just purchased

his company, and was on leave for six months; that my uncle had died several years previous, having seceded from the English Church and professed himself a Roman Catholic; that Mrs. William Vere inherited nearly the whole of her husband's property, and treated her children most despotically; and that Philip had distinguished himself greatly both at college and on service.

In personal appearance, Philip more than realized the promise of his boyhood. Tall, graceful, and handsome, with short, wavy, dark hair, large Spanish eyes, a thin curled mustache, brilliant teeth, a clear olive complexion, and a haughty voice, which seemed toned only for command, he was now the very beau-ideal of a soldier. His indomitable pride sat upon his brow like the jeweled crown of a king: you wondered not that it was there, but would have wondered if it had been absent. Chivalrous, frank, generous, and impetuous, a worthy pupil of his gallant and high-hearted old god-father, my cousin Philip Vere was admirably calculated to win all hearts. There was very little of his Spanish mother in his nature; but unhappily that little was the worst part: it was the revengeful hatred with which he punished an injury. Forgiveness, especially for a mean, or cowardly offense, he could not learn; and his contempt was something terrible to see. But he was too generous and noble-hearted to take offense upon slight grounds: which was fortunate, for his passions once aroused, it was almost impossible to appease them.

I was very glad to see him; it would be difficult to say how glad. His presence was a real joy—much greater and deeper than I had ever expected to feel again; and I was most grateful for it. It took me back to Ingerdyne and our pleasant walks and rides; the afternoons in the water-side bower, the box-branch, the carpet of ivory, the canopy of leaves, and the graceful trees, with their festoons of hop and wild clematis. It carried me back to those happy days when I used to sit in one of the great library chairs, reading Shakspeare and fairy tales to old Sir Hugh; and, as I heard Philip's voice talking to his great dog Lara, I almost fancied I heard Sir Hugh's, also, and felt his approving pat upon my head.

But a great change had evidently taken place in Philip. He was still impetuous and hasty as ever; but, mingled with it, there was more gentleness, more tenderness, more thought for others, and less selfish care for himself, than of old. Often, during that evening, I caught his eyes fixed upon me with looks of ingenuous and pure affection; and, for the first time, I understood and felt that indescribably blessed feeling—the love of a sister for an only brother. I now knew what love he had felt for me at Ingerdyne, and was feeling now; and the exquisite consciousness that I was so loved and cared for, almost obliterated the memory of past sorrow. I felt so proud of him, so grateful to him, that, in his hands, I was a child; more of a child than I had ever been at Ingerdyne; and he, in return, thought for me, directed me, and loved me, as generously and unselfishly as if I had been, indeed, his sister.

Once only our good understanding was for a few minutes disturbed; and that was when, the

day after his arrival in Norwich, he insisted upon settling an annuity upon my mother and Helen, out of his newly-acquired fortune.

"I do not ask you to take it, Flor.; you must come and live with me and Lotta (he had told me the night before of his engagement to a great niece of Sir Hugh Danvers); but I do ask you to be reasonable, and throw no obstacles in the way of my relieving your mother from her dependence upon you; I do ask you to let me place my aunt and cousin in comfort and freedom."

"If I fail in my American expedition, you shall, Philip; but not otherwise. It would be folly in me, or worse, to leave the stage now, without having earned the independence for which alone I entered upon it. No, Phil.; let me have my own way; let me make my mother independent of myself and every body else, and then I'll come and live with you and your Lotta as long as you'll keep me."

"You are proud and ungenerous, Flor.; and selfish, too. Why will you refuse me the greatest pleasure I can know? Why will you condemn me to the mortification of leaving you to contend with this hard, cold world alone, in the most horrible of professions? It is most ungenerous, Flor.: if you loved me as you ought to do, or as I love you, you would not pain me so."

"Indeed, Phil., I would not willingly pain you; but, even if there were no other objection, remember that Miss Danvers ought to have a voice; she ought to be consulted."

"No, no; I am as sure of Lotta as I am of myself: she is the most generous, noble-hearted girl on earth; and she loves me so well (here Phil. drew up his figure, and his eyes glistened with pride and confidence), that if I gave away all I have, and brought home fifty relations for her to love and cherish, she would only say, 'Well done!' No, Flor.; Lotta loves me, as I love her, too well, to need consulting on a point like this, where honor and affection are concerned."

"You are very, very kind, Phil.; but—"

"But nothing, Flory! It is your duty to obey me, as the eldest male representative of your grandfather; and obey me you must! As for dear, darling Lotta, she will be in England next week, thank heaven! and she shall speak for herself."

"But justice to—"

"My children you mean, I suppose," said Philip, again interrupting me, with an air of mock gravity. "Ah! I never thought of them; that is an obstacle certainly. But we must hope that they will not exceed the Patriarch's in number, and that their mother's trifling fortune will be sufficient to furnish the necessities of life—at least for a time. Poor little dears! it was very unpaternal to forget them, certainly; only I am so apt to overlook things which are not in existence; I'm not half so provident as you, Flor. But, since you have awakened me to a sense of one of my responsibilities, another has dawned upon me: what is to become of my grandchildren?"

Upon the Monday of the next week, Philip went to London to receive his Lotta and her mother, from the ship in which they had returned from Calcutta; and two days after, to

my great surprise, they all made their appearance in my little room at Norwich.

"You must love each other dearly," he said, with a proud and happy smile, as he placed the hand of his beautiful betrothed in mine.

But who that looked in that exquisite face, would have needed the injunction to love and cherish her? She was so gentle, so amiable, so frank and gracious, in all her womanly ways and thoughts, that not to love her would have been impossible. I soon loved her nearly as well as Philip did; and she, in return, clung to me as to an elder sister.

Lady Danvers (her mother) was a widow, with no other child than Lotta; she was immensely rich, very good-natured, very indolent, and very fond of Philip. She had strong and shrewd good sense at command, whenever she chose to exert herself so far as to use it; but, in general, she preferred letting things take their own way, disliking the trouble of interfering. She had a habit, too, arising from this very indolence, of uttering short, abrupt, and what seemed dictatorial sentences. She seldom had a will of her own; but when she had, you invariably learned it from one of these positive little announcements: and in such a one she expressed to me, the day after her arrival in Norwich, her determination that I should agree to Philip's proposal.

"My dear, you must! It's all nonsense making a fuss about it! Philip has plenty of money; so has Lotta, and you have a right to share it; and you must! So let me hear no more about it; it tires me horribly. I hate talking; and in England one seems to do nothing else."

And so the matter rested for several days; every body but myself appearing to take it for granted that I had consented. But they were wrong—I had not consented! I had not reconciled myself to the idea of dependence, even upon a cousin; because, apart from every feeling of pride—of the indulgence of which, since the receipt of Mr. Lyle's letter, I had learned to be ashamed; I thought then, as I do still, that the power and opportunities to work, are God's encouragements to do so; and that when He gives His creatures means and strength, it is His will that they should be used. Each man's powers are given to meet his needs; and although help and cheer ought to be offered and urged upon all, who, struggling through this world to another, find their path hard beset; yet, unless in rare and peculiar cases, that aid should never be suffered by the recipient to supersede his own earnest labor.

Cases there are, where, from early folly—perhaps humbly, though late repented of—men's struggles onward seem unavailing; not one step higher do they climb the ladder of success, but rather, despite all their efforts, fall back continually. Such, then, are God's legacies to man. He is making them to pass through the fire of affliction here, to purify and save them hereafter. And such men—the sons whom God is chastening—it behoves their brethren to aid with loving and generous hands; and they may take such help, feeling that it is heaven-sent. But this case was not mine; I knew that my mission and lot were to labor where He had placed me—at least, until His mercy, prospering my toil, should give me a right to ease.

But to decide on this, I would not again wholly rely upon myself. Detesting the idea of dependence as I did, and fearing that I had suffered this feeling to carry me too far in my treatment of Mr. Lyle's letter, (for, now that it was too late, I remembered that I might have learned both his address and that of his solicitor, at Forest Home,) I would not trust myself to judge of the offer which had been made to me; therefore I wrote to Lady Frances Hastings, and asked her to advise me.

When the letter was gone, I felt relieved and happy; knowing that I could rest securely upon her wisdom and tenderness, and that she would decide rightly. I said nothing to my companions of what I had done; endeavouring, till her answer came, to dismiss the subject from my mind. But this was difficult to do; especially when Philip told me, the very next day, that he had seen Mr. Hill the evening before, and arranged that my engagement with him should be considered to have terminated. He did not say then, what I discovered afterwards, that he had paid the manager a large sum of money to cancel the agreement I had made; but he took it as a matter of course, which needed no explanation.

"Now you are free, Flory: free to come and go at your own will, and stay with mamma and me for ever," said Lotta, putting her little hand upon my arm; "we shall be so happy. And tomorrow, if you are ready, we will go to Brighton, and try and persuade your pretty sister Helen and Mrs. Sackville, to go with us into Yorkshire; shall we?"

I escaped the difficulty of a reply, by an appeal from Lady Danvers, who summoned me to her writing-desk to seal a letter; and when the morning came, a great change had taken place.

I was later than usual that day in appearing at the breakfast table; and upon my entering the room, the whole party had assembled. All my apologies were met by merry jests and droll conjectures as to the cause of my dilatoriness, and I was rebutting the gay charges brought against me, when Philip cried,

"Well, Flor., I am not sure but that you have done wisely in delaying your appearance, for see, what an awful thing is here! A lawyer's letter, I am certain, by the paper and the caligraphy: nobody but a lawyer makes such I's as these. There, Flor.; now, have you courage to open it; or does some ghost of a milliner's undrefrayed bill weigh upon your conscience? Come, confess, confess.—But what's the matter? are you ill?—how pale you are!—What's the matter, Flor.? tell me,—speak."

I put the letter into his hand, and sank into a chair.

"Capital! charming! Oh! Flor., dear, darling, lucky Flor.; I wish you joy with all my heart. You do deserve it thoroughly," he cried, when he had read the letter.

"What—what is it, Flory—what have you got? Do be quiet, Philip; or tell us what it is all about," said Lotta.

"I will read—listen.

"Lincoln's Inn Fields, March 24.

"MADAM—It is our painful duty to inform you of the decease of our late respected client, Horace Lyle, of Forest Home, Esq.

"One of our firm waited upon him at Naples,

a few days previous to his death, which took place in that city, on the 2d inst.; and, by a will then prepared, the whole of his estates, with the exception of a few trifling legacies to servants, are devised to you.

"We shall be glad to hear from or see you, at your earliest convenience.

"We are, madam,

"Your most obedient servants,

"WETHERBY ASHLAKE, & Co."

Overpowered by feelings—which, as Philip said, were far more like those of one who had suddenly lost a fortune, than of one unexpectedly enriched—I left the letter in Lotta's hands; and, anxious to escape the congratulations which jarred painfully upon my heart, I retired to my room to regain the composure which had been thus mournfully shaken.

CHAPTER LVI.

It is strange, how few people ever did, or, I fear, ever will, understand the shock this letter gave me, or appreciate the deep grief which the tidings of Mr. Lyle's death occasioned. True, I had for weeks mourned over, as certain, the sad fact which was now thus formally announced; but with—if I may use the term—a certain reserve of sorrow: a half unconscious hope, preventing that utter abandonment to grief, which (although we know it not at the time) we rarely feel for a dreaded loss, as for one that is assured.

I had always thought that my sorrow for Mr. Lyle's death was as strong as it was possible for any feeling of my heart to be; but by what I suffered now, I knew that, even in the bitterest moments, there had been an unacknowledged something—not hope, but her shadow—which had supported me. I had not sorrowed then as I did now.

But stronger even than these feelings, was my angry self-contempt for the hateful selfishness of my late grief and fears. How little had I thought of him, how much of myself! And until the last few weeks, when, by his own deed, he had recalled himself to my thoughts, how entirely and ungratefully had I forgotten him! How different had been his conduct! That he had never forgotten me, was evidenced now. What stronger proof of abiding, unforgetting love, could he have given, than that which I had just received? What, for his own child, could he have done more? And how had I deserved it? These questions humbled me painfully.

Conscious how little I merited his generous remembrance, how ill I had returned his watchful and constant affection, his bounty heaped burning coals upon my head. What would I not now have borne or forfeited, to have had the blessed reflection that I had in some way deserved his love: that I had thought less of myself, my own joys and griefs, and more of others! That I had better requited and valued the noble heart, whose pulses were now stilled for ever. *Oh! the bitterness of having benefits and tenderness lavished upon us, and feeling, in our inmost soul, that we are unworthy.*

How true it is that none can sting us as we sting ourselves! Our own folly, wickedness, and ingratitude, are our keenest and most re-

morseless tormentors. Of all the wrongs we commit against ourselves and others, they are the severest avengers; and this I was now doomed to feel.

Could my benefactor have seen the bitter tears of self-reproach that I wept, on reading the words of ill-deserved eulogy in which he had chosen to convey his bequest, he would have pitied and forgiven me. One passage in his will was inexpressibly generous and affecting: it was this,

"As it has pleased Almighty God that I should be the last of my race, and, therefore, as the feelings of no one can be offended by the permission, I leave my successor entirely at liberty to sell or keep Forest Home, as she pleases. In this, and all matters relative to the property she receives from me, I wish her to be wholly unfettered; and fully entering into the natural anxiety Miss Sackville will feel to recover the estate so long held by her family, and so recently lost, I hereby give my cordial assent to her selling Forest Home, if by so doing she can repurchase Ingerdyne; while it is my earnest request that she will have no scruple of delicacy in obeying the honorable impulses of her own heart, but will believe that in following them, she will best carry out my wishes and designs."

None but those who know how fondly Mr. Lyle loved the ancient house of his family, could appreciate the generosity of this permission; and not to have gratified all the pride of all my race, would I have acted upon it, when I found that by so doing I must sacrifice his birthplace. At first, when the amount of the property to which I had thus unexpectedly succeeded was undefined, I was full of great and eager hope that I should be able to regain Ingerdyne; and many were the proud dreams in which I indulged: but a few hours spent with my solicitors dispelled the vision.

From that interview I returned perplexed and somewhat disappointed: I had given myself three things to do, and found that I had only power to achieve two of them.

The three things I had wished for were, to buy Ingerdyne, to keep Forest Home, and to portion Helen. She had confided to me her engagement to the son of an old baronet, to whom she had become attached while staying at Brighton, during my visit to Mrs. Spencer.

Poor girl! how thankful I was to have the means of smoothing any of the difficulties which had saddened her merry laugh, and tamed her buoyant spirits. She had unhappily entered into the engagement unknown to my mother or to Sir Baldwin Tracy; and, unused to disappointment or trial, and unable to bear them, was upon the eve of an elopement with her impetuous betrothed, when the change in our fortunes occurred. This she confessed to me upon the first evening of our reunion; and as, sitting at my feet, she laid her beautiful head upon my knee, and looked up in my face, her own bedewed with tears, my heart grew faint and sick. Her love might be blessed and happy; mine could never be either. Self-absorbed again, I scarcely heeded her pleading words, and did not answer them, until she repeated,

"You will help us, dear, darling Flory, won't you?"

"Help you!—yes, certainly—of course," I replied, absently.

"I knew you would: I always told Baldwin how generous you were, and that if ever you were rich you would help us," she said, joyfully.

"Did you?"

"Oh, yes, always, always. How you will like him Florence: he is so handsome, so generous, so chivalrous. I often tell him that it is a pity we do not live in the olden time, he would make such a gallant knight. But how dull you are, Florence, and I am so happy. What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, love."

"Nothing! Oh, Flory, what a true woman's answer. I thought wise, sedate people like you, never spent time so unprofitably, or gave such evasive replies," she said merrily; for her face and heart were all sunlight again. "Do you know," she went on, "that Baldwin is so anxious to see you: he has such odd ideas of you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, grandmamma, indeed," she replied, in the gay mimicking tone of old: "are you not anxious to hear what they are?"

"It will not be fair to tell me, will it?"

"Oh, yes; he will soon be wiser. First, then, he fancies that you are very cold, and very proud, and very awful."

"Oh, Helen! what can you have said to make him think so ill of me?"

"Nothing, love," she repeated, laughing.

"Oh, Helen!"

"And oh, Florence! Now confess, is not that 'nothing love,' a most comprehensive and agreeable reply, admirably calculated to relieve anxiety and prevent curiosity: one must be a very inquisitionist to persist in making inquiries in the face of such a satisfactory explanation."

"What a happy temperament yours is, Helen! Five minutes since, you were in tears, and now you are as gay as ever."

"Because I am so happy. Oh, Flory! if you knew how miserable I have been—how I pined and grieved, and how I detested the idea of an elopement—you would understand why I am so gay now."

"I do understand it, love. And I am very happy too; not only for your happiness, but because you will be saved from the danger and sin which threatened you. Indeed, Helen! it would have broken my mother's heart."

"Oh! no, no; she would have forgiven me directly: she is so fond of me."

"Yes; but should not that make you more careful, and less bold to distress her?"

"Yes, I know it should; but I was so miserable, and Baldwin prayed so earnestly, and I loved him so much, and—besides, Florence, mamma could not have been angry, for she herself, you know—papa and she were married in Scotland."

"Ah, Helen! but is it not ungenerous and undutiful to use her confidence against herself: to turn the knowledge she has given us of herself, into a weapon against her?"

"Florence!" said Helen, angrily, "you have no right to speak to me so. Mamma would not. She knows that I love her: ay, better a thousand times than you do, or any one else does. Have I ever deserted her in her poverty? Did I not cling to her through all her sorrow?"

The bitter retort—"And I worked for her," rose to my lips, but it did not pass them. They

quivered, but uttered no sound; and I turned quietly away.

For a minute, Helen did not speak, again then she said,

"I did not mean to offend you, Florence; but you are so captious. You seem to fancy yourself so much better than everybody else, and then you are angry if other people differ from you."

"You are wrong, Helen; I do not think myself better than everybody. If I did," I continued in a lower tone, "I should soon be undeceived."

"Now you are cross Florence! Oh dear, dear, what a foolish girl I am! I am always perpetrating some enormity or other. But you will forgive me, will you not? Baldwin will be so angry for he says you are a paragon. There, Flory, you ought to forgive me, for that pretty speech of his: it is worth a thousand affronts from me to have one such word from him."

But she was wrong: from our first interview, Baldwin Tracy was no favorite of mine. He was a man of shallow capabilities, fiery temper, and reckless passions. His manner was to a certain degree high bred, and therefore pleasing; but his selfishness was so transparent, that, even at his best, I never could like him thoroughly. He was very handsome (at least everybody thought so) and he was as vain of it as a girl; he was very accomplished, and as jealous of approbation as one who lived by it. The only thing for which I cordially liked him, was his love for Helen; but even that was tainted with the selfishness of his nature. He loved her as much as it was possible for him to love any thing but himself, and for her sake would willingly have broken all older ties of love and duty; but self-denial and patience, endurance of pain for another's welfare, or yielding self for another's happiness, were fables to him: things at which he always laughed, as chimeras.

Seeing all this, and knowing that, in a very few years, a wife's best hold on such a man's consideration would be her pecuniary independence of him, I resolved to portion Helen liberally. It was difficult, however, to do this so as to please all parties. Helen, womanlike, fond and confiding, would have lavished a fortune upon her lover; and he was but too ready to encourage her generosity. But I, who had learned experience from my poor mother's fate, determined to protect my sister from a similar one; and, therefore, told Mr. Tracy, gently though firmly, that his bride's fortune must, if it came from me, be settled upon herself. His reply wounded me deeply: but it failed in his evident intention to pique me into yielding; for although it brought the color into my face, and the old flash to my eye, it only confirmed me in the prudence of my determination.

Helen and my mother both tried to shake my resolution: the former from a generous wish to give all to him she loved, and the latter from some unexplained motive, which had been suggested to her by Mr. Tracy. But all was useless: every attempt to change my purpose only served to strengthen it; because it proved that he who urged the opposition, was unworthy of the trust he coveted. They made me unhappy, but not irresolute: it was difficult to steel my heart against Helen's tears, and my mother's sarcasms; but I knew that I was doing right, and nothing could avail against that conviction.

Meanwhile the settlement of Mr. Lyle's affa-

progressed quickly, and in a very short time Mr. Wetherby gave me a concise and intelligible account of my possessions; by which I found that, besides Forest Home, I had sufficient funded property to purchase Ingerdyne, although very little more.

"It will be a capital investment," said the lawyer, tracing with his finger the outline of a plan of the estate, which lay before him upon his office table. "Independently of the pleasure of getting the place back into the family again, I do not know how you could lay out the money better. It will pay you a splendid per-centage."

"But my sister's fortune?"

"Why, certainly, that is a difficulty; but there is something like three thousand seven or eight hundred pounds out on a mortgage, which you could call in and give to her."

"Three thousand eight hundred pounds! Surely, Mr. Wetherby, you are not serious?"

"Why not? you would not mortgage lands yourself, would you? especially at the rate that money brings now."

"No."

"Then, unless you can get Ingerdyne for less than has been asked, and less than it is worth, (which is not probable) what can you do more?"

"Nothing, if I purchase it; but if I give it up?"

"Miss Sackville!"

"I shall be sorry; but at present there seems to be no alternative."

"Sell Forest Home; it is not nearly so improving a property."

"Never, Mr. Wetherby."

"Why? You have the express permission of its late owner."

"Yes, but not my own. It was Mr. Lylo's home; he loved every tree and flower about it; and it shall never, by my act, pass into the hands of those who would not cherish it as he did."

"Whew!" replied the unromantic lawyer.

"Well, then, you must give up portioning your sister; and, since you think three or four thousand pounds too little for a fortune, spend it in the addition of a dressing-case to her trousseau."

"Ingerdyne has never been inhabited since we left it?"

"No; and the grounds and gardens are sadly overrun with weeds, the shrubberies broken down, and the moat overgrown. It has been ruinously neglected; but it is an expensive place to keep in order; you will have to spend most of your spare cash upon it."

"I fear that I shall not have the opportunity. You have given me a great deal to think about, Mr. Wetherby, and you must let me have the whole day for the purpose. You shall hear from me to-morrow."

"To-morrow—another to-morrow! Oh ladies, ladies! how charming you are in every earthly capacity but clients," I heard him mutter as I descended his dingy staircase.

My mother, Helen, and I were now residing in the same quiet hotel, in Albermarle-street, where Lady Danvers and Lotta were staying. It was my mother's and Lady Danvers arrangement; and I, who disliked London so much, was very willing to accede to any thing which seemed likely to lessen the chance of a long residence there. On reaching home, therefore, after my visit to Lincoln's Inn, I found my mother and

Helen had driven out, and that Philip and Lotta were sitting in my little room waiting my return.

"Well, Flor., what have you settled with your lawyer?" asked Philip, as soon as I entered. "Every thing, I hope; for since you have become such a great lady, it is impossible to have five minutes' undisturbed audience. What have you done?"

"Nothing."

"What a long time your nothings take to do, then! Do you know that you went to that man's office at twelve o'clock, and it is now four?"

"So late! Well I am very sorry for having misspent so much time, especially as I must still plead guilty to having made no arrangements."

"What have you been doing, then?"

"Learning to bear disappointment."

"How? Why?" asked Lotta, eagerly.

"Do not be frightened, Lotta; it is nothing very great; only I must give up Ingerdyne," I said, turning to the window.

"Give up Ingerdyne! impossible! You can not, you must not: you have almost lived upon the hope of buying it back, and now to give it up! What has happened?"

"Nothing. Do not ask me at present, love; it is a little disappointment now, but it will soon be over, and then I will tell you all."

But Philip would not so content himself, and at last, little by little, they obtained an account of all that had passed; all my wishes, hopes, and disappointments.

"Poor Flor.!" said Philip when I had concluded. The words sounded strangely; they were the echo of the very same he had addressed to me at our first meeting years before.

"Poor Flor.!"

"No, not poor Flor., but puzzled Flor.," said Lotta, taking my hand; "she is only puzzled, and we must help her."

"Indeed, love, I do not see how you can," I answered.

"Unbeliever! What more easy? Let us lend you the money."

"No, Lotta; with such a fortune as Mr. Lyle has left me, it would be wrong to borrow for pride's sake; it would be unworthy of him. The course I must adopt is very plain, and in a few days it will be very easy too."

"What is it?"

"To relinquish Ingerdyne."

"It will almost break your heart," said Lotta.

"I hope not; and I am sure it will not, if you and Philip will do as I wish."

"How? What do you wish?"

"That Philip, the heir of my grandfather's name, should (since I can not) purchase his estate. I could give it up to him without repining, I think; and it seems fitting, too, that a *Veres* should have the old place again."

"Do you mean it? do you really mean it, Flor.?" asked Philip.

"Yes, indeed I do."

"But the sacrifice! Oh, Florence! you can never make it."

"You are wrong; my greatest ambition has certainly been to redeem the place from strangers; but that will be equally, if not better, done, by your purchasing it. It has belonged for ages to the Veres, it ought to return to them."

And so it was settled; although not without much opposition from my mother, who wished

me to part with Forest Home, and many loving entreaties and offers of help from Philip and Lotta. But to keep *his* beloved home, to visit *his* poor, to continue *his* charities, were to my heart no optional duties, which I might pay to my benefactor's memory or not, as my humor went; but plain and imperative ones, admitting of no compromise.

My mind once decided upon this point, the necessary instructions for Helen's settlements were immediately given; and when she and my mother found that the whole of the money which would have purchased Ingerdyne was devoted to her, they for the first time seemed to understand the motives upon which I had acted.

Meanwhile Philip who had generously kept back his own wish to purchase his grandfather's place, while a hope was left that I might do so, now prosecuted the affair vigorously; and the very day that the purchase was completed, he and I went down to Ingerdyne.

It was evening when we first came in sight of the paling which skirted the park, and the great old trees we both knew and loved so well. Philip's excitement upon seeing them became extreme. During the whole of the journey he had endeavored to restrain his joy, lest it should pain me; but now it burst all bounds, and he was almost wild.

"Drive on quicker—quicker!" he cried to the postillions, as we passed up the well remembered road, and each object which met our eyes seemed like the face of an old friend.

We were not expected: no one knew that the place had changed hands again, and no one therefore appeared to receive us. But it mattered not: we were at home once more, and were better pleased to be alone.

As Mr. Wetherby had told me, the grounds had been sadly neglected: the walks were covered with weeds, and the flower-beds with long rank grass. The lawns had been so long unmown, that they presented the appearance of tangled and matted fields. The beautiful creepers, broken from their fastenings, lay upon the ground, and the roses (my mother's pets) seemed like forest bushes. The shrubby trees had overgrown their boundaries, mingling their branches overhead; and passages through them had been made in all directions by the birds-nesters. The moat, almost hidden by water weeds, looked like a green carpet, so that the beautiful lilies seemed in danger of extermination in their own domain. Nothing wore its old look but my bower; there not a leaf, not a branch, not a hop seemed new or altered: I could have fancied that I had not left it for an hour, and standing once more in its quiet shelter, I almost felt a child again.

How much had passed since I stood there last! and yet, standing there I forgot it all. The same sky, the same trees, the same sounds as of old, seemed to encompass me; and I found myself at last sitting on the low box branch, with one arm round the tree, and listening to the gentle plash of the water hen's wing, as she dived into the moat.

And here I should have sat and dreamed for hours, had not Philip, from whom I had escaped, come hither in search of me.

All through the house, room by room, as if we had never seen it before, we went silently. Not

one word was spoken by either of us: my heart was too full of memories, and Philip's of anticipations, to talk.

It was a painful task to me. The dead silence, only broken by our footfalls in the large lofty rooms; the boarded windows, through the chinks of which the light of the setting sun faintly struggled in; the musty, unhealthy atmosphere, with which no fresh air had mingled for so long a time; the vacant walls, still marked with the lines and rods where the pictures had hung; and the thousand little things, each speaking with its mute but eloquent voice, which met me on all sides, made that hour a bitter one to me. At last Philip, struck by my continued silence and hurried step, appeared to surmise the truth, and with his usual impetuous generosity exclaimed,

"You are unhappy, Flor., and I have made you so. I ought not to have brought you here: I should have known that it would distress you. But I am so thoughtless, so selfish! Forgive me, dearest: I will be more heedful for the future. And now let us go."

The next time I saw the dear old place, it was on the eve of Philip's and Helen's marriages; both of which were solemnized in the venerable parish church which they had attended as children. Immediately after the ceremony, Philip and his bride set off *en route* for Italy, and my mother, Helen, and Mr. Tracy returned to Ingerdyne, where they were to spend the honeymoon; having arranged to come to me at Forest Home for a few weeks, before taking possession of the place which Sir Baldwin Tracy had presented to his son.

During all these events I had maintained an uninterrupted correspondence with my dear friends Mrs. Lyndon and Lady Frances Hastings, the last of whom promised to visit me at Forest Home, immediately I was settled there. Anxious, therefore, to avail myself of her promise as soon as possible, I left Ingerdyne a few days after Helen's marriage, and reached Worcestershire the following evening.

It had been arranged for me by Mr. Wetherby, that all Mr. Lyle's old servants should be retained, and that nothing should be altered in the habits and customs he had established; with most of which I was familiar, from the long visit I had paid to him with my mother some years before. Feeling, therefore, that I was going to a place and people with whom I was well acquainted, the idea of my new Home did not appear so formidable, as it would have done had it been tenanted by strangers; and I looked forward to my arrival with some degree of pleasure. Had I, however, known the joyful surprise that awaited me at my journey's end, it would have been even less laggingly performed.

The sun was setting when the carriage stopped at the quaint old lodge gates, and, standing just within them, leaning upon her husband's arm, the first object upon which my eyes fell was Lady Frances Hastings.

To stop the carriage which was driving on, to spring from it and clasp the outstretched hands of the Colonel and Lady Frances, was but the work of a moment.

It would be difficult to say which of us was most happy, at meeting under such altered circumstances.

CHAPTER LVII.

"We thought you would be so lonely here, after the gayeties of Ingerdyne," said Lady Frances, in reply to my exclamation of delight at seeing her, "that Colonel Hastings and I resolved to come and take you by surprise. We arrived yesterday, and have been very busy ever since in exploring the beauties of this lovely place. I did not expect to find it half so picturesque, although I recollected well your enthusiastic description. I am afraid you will scarcely forgive all the liberties I have taken in your absence; for, remembering your old love of flowers, I have been robbing the green-houses and garden, to make the rooms gay to welcome you; and they look as bright and home-like, as if they had never been deserted."

"Ah! Frances is a dangerous visitor to admit into gardens, Miss Sackville," said the colonel. "I suspect that you will soon be obliged to interdict her presence in yours: she has a most insatiate appetite for flowers."

"I acknowledge it," laughed Lady Frances; "but flower-stealing is not all you will have to forgive, Miss Sackville: I have not confessed half my delinquencies yet. What will you say, when I tell you that I have ventured to extend your kind invitation to Colonel Hastings and myself, and have brought you a visitor?"

"That I am most delighted to have the opportunity of receiving any friends of yours."

"You are a model hostess," said the colonel; "especially as you don't know what horror we may have inflicted upon you: we are not the safest people on earth, I am afraid, to intrust with unlimited power."

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Sackville, I think I can answer for having used my power very innocently this time; I am almost sure you will like my introduction. Indeed I shall be much disappointed if you do not become very fond of each other."

By this time we had reached the house, and, coming forward through the hall to meet us, was an elderly lady, with the most fascinating countenance and noble presence it is possible to conceive.

"My sister, Lady Wyndermere," said Lady Frances, introducing her.

"I ought to apologize for this intrusion, Miss Sackville," said my new guest, with a sweet smile, "but I have heard so much of you from Frances, that I could not bring myself to believe that we were strangers; and arriving unexpectedly at Lily Bank only two days since, I prevailed upon my sister to let me accompany her hither, trusting to your kindness to receive my apologies."

"Which our fair hostess has already been graciously pleased to do," exclaimed Colonel Hastings. "Therefore, ladies, if you have no further confessions to make, suppose we allow Miss Sackville to take possession of her own house; of which I dare say, by this time, she begins to doubt her proprietorship."

The room in which refreshments were laid, was the same formerly used by Mr. Lyle as his study, and being that with which I had been most accustomed to associate his memory, it cost me a great effort to enter it calmly. A chair was placed for me at the head of the table; but Lady Frances, who always read my heart

as easily as if its thoughts were spoken, took it herself: knowing that it would bring the past less forcibly to my mind, if I seemed to take the place of guest rather than that of hostess.

Under the influence of the same consideration and tenderness, the evening passed rapidly away; the melancholy which I had felt was in a great degree removed, and something of my old feeling of Forest Home peacefulness returned.

And how could it be otherwise, surrounded as I was by such kind friends? With my new acquaintance, Lady Wyndermere, I was quite fascinated; and to her sister's great satisfaction, the prepossession appeared mutual. She had been a celebrated beauty, and her manner had that indescribable charm which no tuition can give; nor any but certain natures attain. She was very proud; but her pride sat gracefully upon her: it was the pride of a noble heart, and of a woman possessing many virtues. I never loved her so dearly as I did her sweet and gentle sister; but I loved her very much, nevertheless. To Lady Frances, I went, in grief and trial, for sympathy and help, for counsel and comfort; and to the Countess in times of joy or pride, when the eye flashed, or the heart beat quickly. They were as opposite as light and dark: the dove and the falcon could not be more unlike; and yet both were more than charming.

For many days, the novelty of my position, and the society in which I lived, seemed to divert my mind almost entirely from the past. But in time memory reasserted her claim, and the thought of him I had so recklessly loved, perpetually came between me and peace. Lady Frances was not slow to perceive this: she saw that some grief was preying upon my mind, that some sorrow was wearing my life away, and, with her usual skill and gentleness, she speedily discovered and probed the wound.

"Florence," she said to me one morning, when, according to the custom of the house, we all separated after breakfast to employ ourselves independently of each other until luncheon, "will you come with me? I am going to sketch the avenue of limes from my window, and I should like to have your advice."

We went, and for some time conversed gayly; but the exertion soon became irksome to me, and we were silent. This continued for more than an hour. I held a book in my hand, which at first I feigned to read, but it had long fallen with my hand upon the sofa, and I gazed vacantly upon the lime trees. My thoughts were far, far away, and were not recalled, until the voice of my companion, as she sat beside me and took my hand, restored me to consciousness.

"Florence," she said tenderly, "you are unhappy; tell me what grieves you?"

There was a moment's pause as she waited for my reply, and then Lady Frances continued:

"You do not, I am sure, doubt my affection, Florence; nor my discretion; why, then, have any scruple in confiding your sorrow to me? If I can not remove, I may at least soothe it; and you can have no cause for pain which I may not know."

Still I had not courage to speak.

"May I guess your grief? May I tell you that I know it?"

I looked up hastily.

"Do not fear me, love. You have no cause

to blush : you have gone through your fiery trial well and truly, and peace will come at last. Doubt not, that He who gave you strength to resist temptation, who stood by you in the struggle, will in His own good time reward you with that peace which passeth all understanding ; and that at no distant period you will look back upon those days with surprise and thankfulness."

I shook my head mournfully.

"Love for an unworthy object can never abide long in the mind of a true-hearted and good woman, such as I believe you to be, Florence. For many months it may, or until the heart is thoroughly convinced of the baseness of its idol ; but that once accomplished, his empire is over : she may lament his worthlessness, but not his loss."

"There are many excuses—"

"None, Florence : not one. The act from which you suffer was a deliberate one ; the result of a weak man's self-indulgent treachery. No sophistry can explain, no apology excuse it : it was the premeditated sin of a base, bad heart. Oh ! Florence, that you could see the deed in its true light ; that you could stand by and judge of it in another's case. Your heart would then be free : you could not love so false and pitiful a man."

"Indeed, you judge him too hardly."

"I do not, Florence. And I do so despise and scorn the being who would torture and insult a struggling woman as he has done, that I could not judge him too severely if I would. His whole system has been one tangled web of deceit and treachery."

"No, Lady Frances ; not so bad as that."

"What better ? Do you know where he is now, and what he is doing ?"

"No," I exclaimed ; startled by fear into vehemence.

"Forgive me, if I pain you. The medicine will, I know, be bitter ; but it will be healing, too : read this."

And from the desk beside her, she handed me a Cheltenham paper. It was dated six months after Essex Temple had left Swansea, and contained the following announcement :

"We are authorized to state, that the marriage of Essex Temple, Esq., with Lady Tarbutt, the widow of our late respected townsman, will certainly take place next week. We understand, that the enormous fortune of the bride will be settled upon the children of this marriage, none being left by the former one."

Immediately below this paragraph was another, cut from a paper of later date :

"On Thursday by special licence, at the house of the bride's nephew in Imperial Square, Essex Temple, Esq., of The Woodlands, to Maria, widow of the late Sir William Tarbutt, Knt. After partaking of a sumptuous collation, the happy pair set off for the lakes, where they intend to remain for some weeks."

"The bride," said Lady Frances, contemptuously, "is at least fifty years old, as rich as Cræsus, and as vulgar as is possible for any woman to be."

I held the paper in my hands, my eyes riveted upon its columns ; but I was speechless.

"Come, dearest Florence," whispered my companion, gently removing the paper from my

gaze, "be yourself : shake off this thralldom—the bondage of your fancy, less than of your heart—and despise this worthless and wicked man as he deserves."

I burst into tears, and covered my face with my hands.

"Weep on, dear girl," continued Lady Frances ; "there is no shame in such tears as these : they will relieve your heart, and not subdue it. Do not check your grief because I am by : do not think of me at all ; or, if you do, think of me only as one who loves and esteems you much, and, having been a girl herself, has not forgotten the bitter sorrow young hearts feel, when those they love disappoint them."

"Forgive me," I said, at last ; "but this is a blow for which I was unprepared : I never thought of this. I ought not to grieve : I feel that I ought not ; but I am very, very unhappy."

"I know it : you would be more or less than woman if you were not ; and, though you have a brave spirit, Florence, you have a very tender heart. But the shock once over, its own magnitude will enable you to rally. Had his heartlessness been less apparent, you might still have hoped on, and been still deceived ; but now, the enormity of his falsehood is such, that contempt must take place of regard. Besides, there is another reason, which above all others, will I think be powerful with you. He is married ; and the love which once was righteous, is now a sin."

I shuddered. Milly Trevelyan, on her death-bed, rose like a phantom before my closed eyes.

"From the stain of such a sin your soul is yet pure. May God keep it so!" said Lady Frances, solemnly.

"What for many months you have done unconsciously, and, therefore, innocently, you can do no longer. From this hour you must cast him from your heart forever."

"I will, with God's help, I will!" I exclaimed, "or," I murmured, "I will die!"

"Do not fear," replied Lady Frances, her eyes suffused with tears, as she looked upon my quivering form ; "do not fear : the help you have invoked never yet failed the suppliant at her need. You are safe, Florence. God has great duties yet for you to perform."

"One word more, dear Lady Frances : does any one here know of this?"

"No. I think not—I am sure not."

"Then, how did you ?"

"I will tell you some day : when you are quite happy, Florence."

Tears rose to my eyes, and I turned away.

"You think I mock you, Florence ; but, indeed, it is not so : there is nothing of which I am more certain than of your future happiness. Do not shake your head so skeptically. Remember the old proverb, 'Tis always the darkest hour before day.'"

The whole of the afternoon following this conversation I passed alone ; and the hours thus spent with sorrow and self-examination, though they were bitter, were salutary too. It was no longer against the *feeling*, strong and absorbing as it might be, that I had to combat ; it was against a *sin* ; and what was only weakness or folly a few hours before, became crime now. Happily for me, the evidence was so clear

the guilt of indulging an unhallowed affection so manifest, that I could not, if I would, delude myself with doubts or hopes. Essex Temple, the husband of another, could be nothing to me now; and, although the effort was terrible, almost agonizing, to make, yet, by God's help, it was made, and the prayer to forget him utterly, went up earnestly from my heart to Heaven. But I knew my own weakness too well to hope that a right feeling would ever be established, while I retained any thing which could recall him to my memory; and, therefore, I re-collected all my cherished hoards of letters, flowers, books, and sketches, and committed them to the flames. The turquoise ring he had exchanged with me, I took from my finger, and sealing it up, put it out of my sight forever. I did not choose to return it: I would not give him the opportunity of writing to me, even one common word of acknowledgment.

There may appear great cowardice in this last act; but the experience of my life had taught me a humiliating lesson: to fear myself more than others; and I knew that what I would conquer, I must, as far as possible, avoid. Oh, the deep wisdom of that prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." Never until I was thus called upon to uproot it, did I know how strong and intense my love was; how it had twined itself with every hope for the future, and every thought of the past.

During the next few weeks, the presence of Lady Frances was of inexpressible comfort and support to me. Her active industry in the cause of good, her self-denial and profound humility, as well as the whole tone of her calm and religious life, were invaluable.

From the morning when I returned the newspaper containing the announcement of Mr. Temple's marriage, and in a few hasty words told her what I had done, the subject was never named between us. It was my earnest request that no allusion should ever be made to it, even between ourselves: I dreaded the danger of lamenting over, and unburying the past, and I knew that I should not be proof against the enfeebling influence of pity. In learning to forget him I had once loved so well, I had given myself a hard task to perform; and many, many times my spirits sank to find how little I had achieved; but at last, day by day, and week by week, my mind gradually recovered its serenity, and before the autumn leaves of that year fell, I became cheerful and happy, although not gay.

To this tranquil state of mind, Lady Wyndermere had, all unconsciously to herself, contributed not a little. Different as were the dispositions of Lady Frances and her sister, neither was seen in its full beauty alone; but, associated together, that must have been a hard nature which did not profit by the practical lessons the lives of both these ladies taught.

The winter of this year I spent with Philip and Lotta, at Ingerdyne; and the first few days of my visit were entirely occupied in receiving the many old friends who thronged to greet and welcome me. Among the foremost were Mr. Spencer and his mother. I was alone when they were announced, and certainly, next to finding myself in my dear old home again, their visit gave me more pleasure than any circumstance which had

occurred. After the first hasty words of greeting—which would have been perfectly unintelligible to any stander-by, they were so full of eagerness and emotion—Mrs. Spencer placed herself in the cushioned chair which I arranged for her, and holding my hands in both her own, looked tenderly into my face. Something that she saw there did not please her, for she shook her head, saying:

"You are looking ill, Flory: pale and thin; as if the troubles of the last two years had been almost too much for you. And yet there is the old light in your eyes that I used to love so much. Your heart has come back to us, Flory dear, if your bright looks have not."

"Oh, yes, indeed it has; or," I added—my conscience accusing me for the wayward passion I had indulged, and forgetting at the moment that Mrs. Spencer was, of course, ignorant of the story—"it will do so. I could not live in this dear place, seeing the faces I love so well as yours, dear Mrs. Spencer, and suffer my heart to wander."

The bright glow of pleasure with which the old lady heard these words, and glanced at her son, suddenly reminded me of the interpretation he might put upon them, and I became confused and nervous. But, true to the generous delicacy of his nature, he suffered no ray of intelligence (except the lightning glance which shot involuntarily from his eyes) to betray his consciousness of my embarrassment. As calmly as I could, I went on to say:

"But you have been absent from the neighborhood nearly as long as I have. When did you return from France?"

"Only a few weeks since. You know that Frank gave up his practice as soon as you left us; so we had nothing to bring us back earlier. Oh, Flory! at one time I thought I should be left in those horrible popish countries by myself; for he was so ill: so very, very ill. He does not look so now, though, does he? One would not think he had been given up by the doctors."

"Nay, mother," said Mr. Spencer, laughing, "that is quite a fancy of your own; but Miss Sackville knows your penchant for such things, and will understand that your reports are somewhat imaginative."

"Very well, Master Frank, very well; that is always the way with you: when you are ill, nobody ever was so ill, and when you get well again, you've never been ill at all. But your poor uncle was just the same, so I must forgive you, I suppose: it is a general infirmity, natural to all gentlemen, I think."

"Are you not living at Abberly, now?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Frank purchased Aston from Mr. Comberton's executors. His affairs were very much involved, poor man: he never recovered that election. By-the-by, Flory, do you know that our old member, Mr. Maudesley, has succeeded to his uncle's title, and married your great friend Mary Vaughton?"

"Indeed! where do they live? I should have thought Mary the last girl to marry such a man as he was; and him the very last person on earth to do such a quiet, steady thing as to ask her."

"Ay, so did every body. But when young Vaughton died, there was only Mary to inherit all her father's money, which was very con-

siderable : something like five thousand a year ; and Mr. Maudesley finding, I suppose, that a peerage without means to keep it up was a very undignified position, contrived to make himself agreeable to the heiress ; and in a few months after Edward Vaughton's death, his sister became Lady Fanshawe."

"Well, I am rather sorry. It is a match of ambition and interest on both sides, I fear. Do they live near us?"

"Sometimes : they come down to the court for a week, now and then."

"Things seem sadly changed within the last few years : even since I remember this neighborhood," said Mr. Spencer. "It is something like old times, certainly, having a Vere here again : but there's myself at Aston, instead of the Combertons ; these dashing people at Vaughton Court, instead of the quiet old general ; the manor let to a tribe of Manchester cotton people ; Farleigh Hall advertised for sale ; and Mowbray shut up."

"Mowbray shut up ! Why, where is Lady Mowbray, then?"

"Heaven knows !" answered Mr. Spencer : though Heaven would have nothing to do with her, such a good-for-nothing, wicked woman as she was. I'm sure it was a great comfort when the neighborhood was relieved from her evil presence."

"And where is she?" I asked, from Mr. Spencer.

"At Rome, I believe. She staid at Mowbray as long as she could after her husband's horrible death (for I suppose you heard that he had shot himself), trying to brave the county ; but it was useless. H—shire has a fashion of its own, you know, and will not be defied ; so, after a few months, in which she must have encountered endless mortifications, if not deliberate insults, she was driven away. She bore it wonderfully, however : I met her in Paris, she looked as well and as false as ever."

"The old place is quite deserted, then."

"Quite ; and it is better so : at least, until poor Milly's story passes into a legend. At present, none of the family could live there in peace. Ere long, the whole sad history will belong to the housekeeper's store of traditions ; and then the Mowbrays may go back," said Mr. Spencer.

"Yes ; but they are a bad set, I'm afraid ; and certainly don't deserve that we should waste our time in talking about them. I had rather talk about you, Flory. How long were you ill in that horrible London, after we called on—"

"Mother !" cried Mr. Spencer, as if to warn her that she was betraying herself.

"Oh, dear, dear, how thoughtless I am !" she exclaimed hastily : "I always forget."

"But I never do," I said eagerly. "So it was you, then ! I thought—I was sure, it was. But why did you not see me ? Ah, I remember—they thought I was dying. And it was you, then, to whom I owe all the comforts which brought me back to life and health : you, who watched over and preserved me, when I was forgotten by every one else—dear, dear Mrs. Spencer !"

"Now, don't say a word, darling. I didn't mean you should ever know it : but I am so

careless. It is not worth mentioning ; but, little as it is, I mustn't take credit that does not belong to me : it was Frank's thought."

"Nonsense, mother ! it was nobody's thought. Pray do not dignify such a nothing with the name of a thought : it was simply a very bold act, for which the only apology is, that it grew out of circumstances ; and the less you and I say about it, I think, the better."

"No, no ; do not treat it so lightly. If you knew the great value *that* money was to me—how it procured me comforts, and even necessities, rest and advice I never could have had otherwise—you would not speak of it so. It was a real and great service ; and one that I trust I may never forget or undervalue. Nor would you, either ; if you believe as I do, that that money (under God) saved my life."

"May God be thanked, then !" said the old lady, her kind eyes filling with tears. "And now, never say another word about it. You know that I once offered you all I had in the world ; and, although you are rich now and don't want it, yet you are as welcome to it as ever. I only wish I could comfort myself with the hope that some day you would take it. But, oh dear, dear !—"

"Do you know, Miss Sackville, if Captain Vere has arranged any thing about the Rockley Covers ? He said, at the Meet last Wednesday, that it would be better not to draw them this season," broke in Mr. Spencer suddenly, trying to divert the evident direction of his mother's thoughts, but speaking with burning cheek and unsteady voice ; feeling that his words were just *à propos* to nothing.

"I do not know. I have heard nothing of it," I answered, in little less confusion than himself ; for I felt distressed and awkward.

"How you do fly about, Frank," said the old lady, in some displeasure. "What have Rockley Covers got to do with what I was talking to Miss Sackville about?"

"Nothing, I confess ; but I was very anxious : and here comes Mrs. Vere, who can, doubtless, enlighten me."

And to my great relief, the entrance of Lotta made the conversation general.

After this visit, scarcely a morning passed that Philip and Mr. Spencer did not contrive to meet at each other's houses ; and, not unfrequently, Lotta and I had the pleasure of receiving old Mrs. Spencer, as a guest at Ingerdyne. The days upon which she came were always happy ones to me ; for, better disciplined and more chastened now than I had been during our first intimacy, I had learned to appreciate as they deserved, her real goodness of heart and truly amiable character. Nevertheless, after a time, I avoided as much as possible returning her visits at Aston : not, however, from any aversion to the place, but from a certain undefinable shyness, for which I could not account. But if my object, in thus declining Mrs. Spencer's repeated invitations, was to avoid her son, it certainly was not attained ; for the less we went to him, the more he came to us, until at last his appearance became as regularly expected as the morning itself.

"I can not imagine," said Lotta, one day, in the perplexity of a young hostess arranging a grand dinner, "what brings Mr. Spencer on

here, day after day, in this fashion? He's a very delightful man, I must acknowledge; but one may have too much of the society of even delightful men, when they present themselves so often: besides, one never knows how to arrange. Before you came, Flory, the difficulty was to get the Spencers at all; and now—" here she shrugged her shoulders.

"Dear little housewife," said Philip, "lament not over thy dinner, nor the perversity of man; both are out of thy province: leave the one to Reynolds, and the other to time, and let Spencer come and go, derange the symmetry of numbers, or make an odd one at lunch, without notice."

"But why, Philip, why? It is so disagreeable never to know who is coming, or how many we may calculate upon. I do not care when we are alone; but when I want to arrange—"

"Never mind, even then. Spencer and I have an immensity of business together, and it is absolutely necessary that we should meet at all times and seasons; isn't it, Flory? So be a dear, good little wife, and don't take any notice of his vagaries."

"Well, if I must not—but it is very tiresome, Philip; it is a great annoyance to Florence and me."

A merry laugh from my cousin answered this speech, and before any more was said, I left the room.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IN this way, with the Spencers for our daily visitors, the monotony of a country winter being diversified by heavy dinner-parties, stupid balls, and still more stupid concerts at the county town, the dark months passed—not unpleasantly, though; for Lotta enjoyed the visiting and going out as much as I did staying at home, and Philip spent at least three days a week considerably to his satisfaction in following Lord P——'s hounds.

At last, however, Lady Danvers wrote to her daughter, informing her that she had returned to town for the season, having secured a house in Spring Gardens; and inquiring whether she should take one which happened to be vacant close by, for her and Philip. To this my cousin gave instant consent, and the following week, on the first bright day of May, when the country was beginning to put on its sweet spring robes, we left Ingerdyne for London.

In a few days our doors were besieged; and then commenced that wearying, profitless round of visiting and dissipation: that fearful waste of time and fortune, for which the fashionable world has so much to answer.

Young, rich, beautiful, and a bride, Lotta soon became the fashion; and Philip, who gloried in the admiration she excited, encouraged her in all her extravagant fancies and childlike love of pleasure. At first this made me very uneasy; for I knew my cousin's impetuous and excitable disposition, his fiery temper and exacting jealousy, and I feared lest his wife—in the perfect innocence and gayety of her nature, her ignorance of evil, and confidence in herself—should arouse the slumbering demon in his heart.

One of the earliest requests which Lotta made to her husband, was, that he should take a box for her at the Opera; and as Lady Danvers

agreed to share the expense, in consideration of her power to claim a seat whenever she chose, Philip readily consented. The next step was Lotta's presentation at court; and then, fairly launched into fashionable life, balls, dinners, concerts, operas, followed each other in rapid succession.

Into very few of these gayeties, however, could I bring myself to enter; and, notwithstanding Lotta's entreaties, and Philip's urgency, I went out very little. Lady Frances Hastings was in town, and almost every morning that I did not spend with her, I passed either in riding with my cousin, or sitting with Mrs. Spencer. Lotta sometimes joined us in our rides, for she was a graceful and courageous horsewoman; but, generally, she was too fatigued with the exertions of the previous night, or was recruiting for the next.

As I had feared, Philip, after a few weeks, became impatient at the world's claim upon his wife, and strove to undo the mischief he had helped to do. But it was too late; Lotta had tasted the intoxicating draught of popularity, and, good and true as she was, it was impossible to make her see that that course was wrong to-day, which a week before had met with her husband's cordial approval. Conscious of her own perfect integrity of thought and deed, remembering how Philip had encouraged and enjoyed her success, how willingly he had aided and abetted all her extravagances of expenditure and habits, it was very natural that she should be vexed at this sudden change. Not that it was really sudden; for those who knew Philip as well as I did, were prepared for it, feeling assured that after a time he would resent even an imaginary neglect on the part of one he loved so well: but to Lotta it seemed sudden; and so far unjust.

I remember one day having made an appointment with Philip, his wife, and Mr. Spencer, to ride to Dulwich in the morning, see the pictures, and return to a quiet dinner and the Opera. The night before, Lotta went to three parties, and returned home so tired that she declared it was out of the question expecting her to keep her engagement with us. Lady Danvers came in while we were talking about it and advised me to go alone.

"Philip will take care of you," she said, "and when you come back, Lotta will be refreshed and ready for the Opera."

"No," replied my cousin, "Lotta must go: we will have the carriage if she likes, or we will give up the Opera; but she must accompany us, according to her promise;" and, with the determined air of his boyhood, he left the room to go to his wife.

"Philip is quite right," said Lady Danvers; "only he should have begun earlier. I hate the life Lotta is leading, and he ought to put a stop to it; but he has no business to quarrel with her now, for indulging the tastes he has helped to form. It isn't just. I don't like it."

In a few minutes Philip came down; and fearing, from the expression of his face, that something was wrong, I went up stairs to Lotta. I found her in her dressing-room, standing by the table, her habit was lying upon a chair, and her hat upon the ground: her face was flushed, her lips were quivering, and her eyes looked tearful. Upon my entrance, she turned away; she was

evidently deeply hurt, and did not choose that I should see it. I went up to her, however, saying, while I pointed to the riding-dress, "I am glad to see that you are better, love, and that we shall have you with us. I was afraid poor Philip would be disappointed; but now that you are going—"

"I am not going," she answered, busying herself with her bracelet.

"Not on horseback, perhaps, but in the carriage; and though you know that I am not generally an advocate for driving, in preference to riding, yet to-day I feel so tired, that I think I should enjoy sitting still and doing nothing."

"I do not intend to go at all, either riding or driving," said Lotta.

A moment's silence ensued, and then she continued, with a burst of tears,

"Philip is very unjust, Florence; and very unreasonable: when we first came to London, he did all he could to make me fashionable and gay, and now he is angry at it. You know how little I cared about it at first, how very willing I was to be quiet; but now, when I have so many pleasant acquaintances and pursuits, it is unreasonable to expect me to give them up for a whim."

"No one does expect it, love," I answered, doubtfully; for I felt that I was on dangerous ground; not knowing what had passed between Philip and his wife. "No one can or does expect you to give up all your friends and engagements; only that you will not suffer them to monopolize you so entirely. Think how little we see of you."

"Is that my fault?" cried Lotta, impetuously. "I never receive or accept an invitation which does not include one for you and Philip, and am I to blame because you will not go?"

"Certainly not; only—"

"Well then, what do you or Philip mean by saying you see so little of me? If you would see me more, do as I do, go where I go. It is too late to talk, as he did just now, of my love of gayety. I own it: but he taught me; and I can not throw off the friends I have made, simply because he changes his mind."

This was new and sad language, and I felt more thankful than I can express, that no listening busybody was near to report and comment upon it. One such rash speech as this, repeated to Philip, might do incalculable and irremediable harm: and, alas! enough had been done already. The one great fault of his character aroused, it was impossible to conjecture how far it might hurry him; and the thing to do now was to soothe, and not exasperate him. As I reflected upon the passionate scenes of jealous anger to which he had been so prone in childhood, I literally trembled with fear: especially as I found, to my dismay, that Lotta, hitherto so tractable and conciliating, had become by this sudden and impetuous check, irritated, wayward, and willful.

For a few minutes after this speech, I remained silent: I was as much pained as alarmed, and really knew not what to say. When both parties are wrong, it is difficult to hit upon the exact thing which ought to be said to each: to avoid blaming one for the fault which is chiefly the other's, and to give the due measure of praise to both. At last I said,

"Let us make a compromise, Lotta. You complain that I go out so little: and indeed I

fear that you have cause for complaint. I have been very selfish; but if you will consent, for my sake, to give up some of those engagements which deprive us so continually of your society, I will yield my old-fashioned love of home, and accompany you as often as I can. I will promise never to make an engagement without reference to yours; if you, dearest, will do the same."

"I really can not make such a promise, Florence. One would think that I was doing something wrong and wicked, by the way you and Philip speak to me; and while I know that I am not, I will not be dictated to in this manner: it is beyond endurance. If I were a child, or a bad, reckless woman, there might be some reason; but as it is—"

"My dearest Lotta, no one imagines, no one—"

"It's of no use, Florence. If I am wrong, I have been so all along. I am doing no more now, than Philip used to like and encourage. And, after all, I don't know what he is finding fault about. I don't spend half so much as Lady Vincent, nor go out half so often as Mrs. Elphinstone; to both of whom he introduced me. I never visit or receive any person who is in the very least exceptionable; I never—but why do I say all this, as if I were seeking to justify myself? I have done no wrong, and I will not plead as if I had."

"No, no wrong; you misunderstand us all, dear Lotta, if you fancy that we think you have; but you are so young and lovely, so inexperienced in the dangerous follies of the world, and so loved and prized at home, that you can not wonder, dearest, if we fain would keep you there."

She made an impatient movement.

"Not wholly; oh! not wholly: not one hour more than your own judgment would approve; we only wish to put in our claim to share you with the world."

"One would think I never was at home," she said, throwing herself into a fauteuil; but with a very evident amelioration of temper, of which I hastened to take advantage.

"In my country, Lotta, they say that the prisoner only counts those dreary hours when the sun is absent from his dungeon; those glorious ones during which he shines, pass like a bright dream, and their number is unknown."

"What a pretty conceit, Florence! But how is it applicable to your lecture? Am I the prisoner, or the sun, or what?"

"The sun, of course; and we the prisoners: you may illuminate our dark world twelve hours out of the twenty-four, but how can we pause to number them? We have only leisure to count when they are gone. Ah! Lotta, you do not know how weary and long the moments are when we are separated from those we love."

"But I am so tired to-day."

"So am I; and, therefore, if you like, we will give up our ride, and drive instead. But do come if you can; for there's a man at Dulwich who has the most beautiful pony to sell, and if it deserves the character he gives, I intend to buy it and send it to dear Mrs. Mableton. Her pony died a few weeks since, and as she can not walk far, she will lose all this lovely summer weather, unless she has some means of conveyance. Philip will settle about its soundness and capabilities; but I want the benefit of your taste

on its appearance, and beauty, and fitness for a present."

"Why do you not ask Lady Frances Hastings? You have such faith in her opinion."

"Because I choose to ask you. Now don't be ungracious, Madam Lotta, and dole out your favors like an eastern princess; you know very well that I can't buy this animal upon my own responsibility, and you make me feel my dependence in a very royal manner."

She laughed. "How long have you been so helpless, Flor.?"

"Ever since I was confiding enough to trust myself in your tyrannical hands."

"Poor you! Well, I suppose I must go."

She rose, and stretched her hand to the little silver bell which stood beside her; but before she raised it, she drew back her hand irresolutely, and said, "But Philip has been so cross: he almost ordered me to go; and he will think I am afraid, conscious that I have been wrong. No, I will not go," and again she seated herself in her chair.

My heart sank. What should I do? If it were already come to this—a trial of strength between husband and wife: a battle, in which one must conquer—I was indeed upon dangerous ground. Both were evidently wrong: but one must yield. Which was it to be? Duty pointed imperatively to Lotta; and yet, knowing Philip as I did, I could not but feel that his were not hands into which the power of conquest might be safely given. While if Lotta were victorious, as she very likely might be—for how could he *make* her go?—the injury to herself, to her feeling of wifely obedience and duty, would be incalculable. What was to be done?

I had no time to think or to ponder. Philip was waiting and determining down stairs, and Lotta was nursing her indignation and resolving here. Five minutes delay, one ill-chosen sentence or injudicious word, might ruin all. What could I do? At last an idea struck me. Lotta was evidently bent upon showing her independence: her resolution not to be "ordered." If I could manage, therefore, to make it appear that she staid at home because she was ill, and not because she was refractory, her point would be lost, and she might be picked into submission. With this hope, I went forward to the bell and rang it gently. She started.

"What do you want, Florence?"

"Only my writing-case, and to borrow one of your men."

"Why, what for?"

"I am going to write a note to Lady Frances, asking her to drive to Dulwich to-day, see the pony and buy it for me, if she thinks he will do; and I must ask you to spare one of your men, because I sent Wilson to Dulwich this morning to bring back the pony if we purchased him."

"But why ask Lady Frances? Why do you not go yourself?"

"And leave you at home, tired and ill? No, Lotta; if you are unable to give me so much pleasure as the keeping of your engagement would insure to me, I certainly shall not be so selfish as to leave you. You really do look very far from well, and we have been most inconsiderate to urge you as we have done: but you must forgive us this once, and lie down, like a good child; and when I have written and dis-

patched my note, Terèse shall draw down the blinds, and I will read you to sleep."

Who can describe the amazement which gradually overspread Lotta's countenance as I spoke?

"Lie down! go to sleep! Why, Florence, what are you dreaming of?"

"Nothing at present: I leave all that to you. Oh, Terèse, I want you to send me my writing-case from the table in my dressing-room, and give directions that one of the men shall be ready to take a note for me into Grosvenor-square; then come back and arrange some pillows on the couch for Mrs. Vere."

The abigail vanished, and her mistress exclaimed,

"What do you mean, Florence? You are really very tiresome to-day. Why don't you go to Dulwich, and leave me in peace?"

I feigned not to hear, but closed the green outer blinds of the window near which I stood.

"Don't, Florence; don't make the room like a dungeon. I can't think what possesses you to fancy I am ill. Madame Vouillon is going to send some things for me to look at, and I shall not be able to see them: do push those blinds back again."

"Never mind Vouillon; this light is far too strong for your eyes to-day, I am sure. Now let me untie your dress, and put on this cool wrapper. Poor Philip! how distressed he will be!"

And taking the elegant *robe de chambre* from its place, I moved toward Lotta, who retreated so hastily that I could scarcely refrain from laughing.

"What can be the matter with you, Florence? What have you taken into your head? I am not ill yet; but you will soon make me so, if you persist in tormenting me in this way."

"My dear Lotta, you are ill; this very excitement and dislike to go out prove it. I wish you would lie down and keep yourself quiet."

"What for? What in the world for? I am as well as ever I was in my life."

"You say so, to relieve our anxiety; but Philip will not be so easily satisfied. If you are not more tranquil presently, we must have Dr. Somers."

I then closed the lattices of the other two windows, throwing the whole room into that deep shade which I like so much, but which I knew Lotta detested.

"Florence, Florence, you will suffocate me. I'd rather go to Dulwich twenty times, than be shut up in this horrible gloom."

"But you can't go, love. I agree with you that nothing would be so beneficial as a drive in the fresh air; but you are far too weak and tired to bear the fatigue to-day: you must rest."

At this moment Philip tapped at the door, which I opened; saying hastily, in order to forestal any *mal-à-propos* speech,

"Be gentle, Philip; poor Lotta is not at all well."

"Not well!" said he, pushing eagerly past me. "What is the matter? have you sent for Somers? Lotta, darling, what is the matter?"

She looked bewildered. Philip, placing himself on the sofa, put his arm round her, and while he drew her head upon his shoulder, exclaimed, "Send quickly for Somers, Florence. Darling love, how your head burns! and I have been

teasing you to go out : what a brute you must have thought me ? Terèse, order the horses round to the stables again, and tell Moseley I shall not want them to-day. I shall stay here."

Poor Lotta ! She was so perplexed, so thoroughly confused, that her waywardness was gone. I saw that any further interference on my part was needless : Philip and she might now be safely left to themselves. I therefore remained silent, only busying myself about the unwilling invalid ; who was so potted by her husband and so tended by Terèse and me, that she had not courage to insist upon her health. The whole of this day, therefore, she remained in her room, undergoing that very wretched punishment, a regular course of fussing ; so that by night Philip and she were most truly penitent : the one for having, as he thought, caused his wife's illness by his irritability ; and the other for having given way to temper and obstinacy, which now ended in so salutary a manner to those immediately concerned.

The consequences of this little storm, however, fell heavily upon me ; since it involved me in a much larger round of visiting than was at all pleasant : Lotta always insisting that I had promised her not to " shut myself up," as she called it. London, at any time, is far from being a favorite residence with me ; even in winter, and when I can be quiet ; but London in the bright spring, and days divided between calling, shopping, and idling, and nights devoted to folly, is a terrible place. Oh, how thoroughly I disliked the aimless, fruitless existence I led now ! even my theatre life was preferable, for it was hallowed by duty. Hateful as it was, it had an end, and a glorious one ; but these wasted, frivolous hours, to what good, present or future, did they tend ? None.

And apart from the continual reproaches of conscience for this idled time, London fashionable society was any thing but agreeable to me. My history had got abroad ; and as it is quite possible to be very fashionable and very ill-bred too, I had to endure a succession of rude stares, and still ruder whispers, which annoyed me excessively. In the Park, where Lotta generally insisted upon riding, people often rode, or drove, close up to my horse, for the one insolent purpose of staring at me ; and many accidents would doubtlessly have arisen from this intolerable impudence, had not my perfect command of my steed enabled me to sit him under any circumstances. To a girl, accustomed as I had been, almost from infancy, to ride, under my father's eye, some of the finest horses in his picked stables, there was nothing in the equestrianism of Rotten Row to throw me off my guard ; and, to the evident surprise of the lords and ladies there, I held my own with perfect ease and coolness : Sancho, dear old Sancho, whom Philip after an infinite deal of trouble had found for me, answering, as of old, to every touch of the rein.

At the Opera, too, I was continually subjected to similar annoyances ; having to endure *loggiettes* leveled full at my face, audible whispers in the crush-room, perpetual introductions, and repeated and officious offers of unrequired services.

For a time I bore this patiently, thinking that some newer nine days' wonder would arise, and this ill-bred impertinence would then be diverted

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ed ; but, unhappily, I found that this was far from being the case. My fortune made me a constant object of attention, and the heiress prevented the actress from sinking into oblivion. All this made me very uncomfortable : I could not endure the idea of being *countenanced* by people for whom I felt such utter contempt—whose little minds, and still smaller Christianity, made their opinions worthless. And yet so inconsistent is human nature, that I shrank from them like a culprit, and infused into my manners tenfold more reserve and haughtiness than was natural to me. This was very wrong and weak ; but I was so stung, so indignant, so conscious of injustice, that with all my efforts not to show it, I did so every hour.

From this unhealthy state, this selfish dwelling upon myself and my own feelings, I was roused by a circumstance which painfully recalled the past, and harshly reminded me that there was still a claim upon my aid, which a sense of duty would not allow me to leave unsatisfied.

CHAPTER LIX.

LOTTA and I had been to Richmond with Lady Frances Hastings, to spend the morning with her sister ; and when we returned, the very first thing which met my eye upon entering my room, was a letter, the handwriting upon the address of which sent all the blood back to my heart.

It was my father's.

Slowly and fearfully I opened it. The memory of his last communication was deeply impressed upon my feelings, and I dreaded to read this.

It was dated from a sponging house in — street, and ran thus :

"DEAR FLORENCE.—You will see by the address of this note where I am. I only came to England a week ago, and last night I was arrested by that rascal Levi for two hundred pounds, which I raised from him at Ingerdyne to support the extravagances in which you all indulged there. By a mere chance I heard of you this morning, and the immense fortune you have got ; and, as you aided that expenditure for which I am now made to suffer, I shall, of course, expect you to release me. You had better come here yourself with a check-book, so that, in case any other detainees are lodged, you will be ready to draw upon your banker. After the obstinate and undutiful disregard which you showed to my wishes, in persisting in a course which degraded your whole family, you will be glad of this opportunity of making me some slight compensation.

"Yours truly,

"G. SACKVILLE."

With a deep and bitter sigh, I suffered this letter to fall from my hands. My senses were almost paralyzed by its perusal ; and with feelings in which anguish, shame, and fear mingled their terrors, I stood for some minutes helplessly. At last the clatter in the street below, the rattling knocks upon the door, and voices in the hall, recalled me from dreams to action. Lotta was giving a dinner, and guests were arriving.

I must have dreamed away more than an hour

With a sudden impulse of contrition, I picked up the letter, and upon turning to it found that it was dated one o'clock. It was now seven. Six hours! What a long, weary time, for suspense! What must my father be thinking of me? I rang the bell hastily. My resolution was taken: I would go at once. Whatever wrongs my father might have done me, I had no right to inflict upon him the tortures of suspense. I do or refuse the favour you are asked; but decide *at once*."

With a look of wonder, Anstey received my directions, that a carriage should be got ready and brought round immediately.

"Have you forgotten there is a dinner-party to-day, ma'am?" she asked, hesitatingly. "Mrs. Vere is already in the drawing-room."

"No, I had not forgotten: I do not dine at home."

"Will you dress before you go out, ma'am? And am I to accompany you?"

"Neither, neither, Anstey. I am going out on business. Tell them to be quick. I am in haste." And with greater astonishment in her face than she dared express in words, the girl left the room. No sooner had she disappeared, than, throwing off the elegant dress I had worn at Richmond, I enveloped myself in the large shawl and plain bonnet which I wore when exploring the district round in my visits to the poor, and in a few minutes was quite ready.

By this time dinner had commenced, so I went down into the deserted drawing-room, to wait for the carriage; which was likely to be delayed some time, as none of the stable-men could be found.

While I was walking up and down the room, imagining the place whither I was going, and working myself into a state of nervous excitement, which rendered me wholly unfit to encounter the approaching scene, Mr. Spencer entered. He had been with us in the morning, and, as I thought, was now in the dining-room. He almost started as he saw me, and exclaimed,

"You here! And in this dress! Surely something is the matter. Are you going out? Can I—is it any thing that I can do?"

"No; it is only a little business," I answered, trying to laugh.

"Business at this hour! It is very sudden: you did not mention it this morning."

"No; very likely not: and for the best of all possible reasons—I did not know it."

"Then, how? Pray, pardon me, Miss Sackville; but I can not help fearing, from your manner and countenance, that something has occurred to distress you. If it be so, and your cousin is prevented by his duties here from being of use to you, may I venture to offer my services? You know how entirely they are at your disposal."

As I turned away to conceal the agitation this speech had occasioned, I dropped the letter which I had been holding; and, unconscious of the loss, walked to the window. Mr. Spencer saw it fall, and picking it up, recognized the autograph. A sudden exclamation caused me to turn, and the sight of the letter in his hand explained the words which had alarmed me.

"This letter—surely I can not be mistaken; *this address is in Captain Sackville's hand.*"

"Yes."

And avoiding his eyes, which I knew were fixed upon me, I held out my hand for the letter. He took no notice of the action, but said, gently,

"May I venture to ask if you have just received this, and whether it is connected with the business of which you spoke?"

"Yes."

"Has Captain or Mrs. Vere seen it?"

"No."

"And you have had no advice, no assistance, but are acting as usual upon your own generous impulse?"

"I have only just received the letter. My cousin has been engaged," I replied, in some embarrassment.

"Oh, yes; I understand. Still you must, or ought, to consult some one. I fear that a business letter from Captain Sackville is not the safest thing for you to act upon, unassisted and unprotected. If, therefore, it is of such urgency as to require you to go out at this late hour, and you do not choose to send for your cousin, will you honor, will you trust me, so far as to employ me?"

"Indeed," I said earnestly, "there is no one upon whose kindness I would so soon rely; but this letter is confidential: I think it scarcely admits of a consultation."

"Forgive me: do not think me impertinent, or actuated by any unworthy curiosity, in thus urging you; but from my knowledge of Captain Sackville, I can not but fear that in any affair with which he is connected you will need advice and protection. You know my old habits of business; if you could make them useful—I would not presume—"

"Say no more: pray, pray say no more."

He drew back with a pained and grieved expression.

"You misunderstand me; indeed, you do," I said, eagerly. "I meant—I can not bear to give you so much trouble."

"Trouble, Florence!—Miss Sackville—I beg your pardon."

"Read the letter: pray read it," I exclaimed, in confusion.

"No, Florence, not yet," he cried, impetuously; as, after a moment's eager pause, to read my downcast features, he threw the letter upon the table, and went on rapidly and breathlessly, "not till I have destroyed or confirmed the mad hope which has just sprung into life. I did think it was crushed forever: but there is something in your manner which gives it new life; and, be the issue what it may, I must speak."

"Long, long ago, when I first ventured to tell you the feelings with which you had inspired me, I promised that an avowal which gave you so much pain should never be repeated; and when I so promised, I truly hoped to keep the pledge. I went abroad, trusting that time, new scenes, and absence, would aid me in the resolve; but I found them powerless: from the hour I first loved you, to this, Florence, your image has never been absent from my heart: no other living creature has ever displaced it for a moment. When I learned that you had gone upon the stage (a fact I only knew by accident), I determined to return instantly to England, and, at any risk of offending you, remove you from it. In the midst of my preparations, I was taken

ill; and when at last I arrived here, I found you an heiress.

"At first I struggled manfully against the love which still absorbed every feeling of my heart; but at last, yielding to the sweet influence of your kindness and presence, I gave myself up wholly to the spell. Still I had no hope: I felt how immensely you were above me, and I was content to live on, as Ghebers do, adoring what I could never reach. But lately a hope has dawned upon me—a strange wild hope; and even as I speak it grows, Florence, stronger and stronger: you do not turn away: you let me keep your hand. Oh, Florence, Florence! think what you do. Another moment of this deep joy, and I can not bear to lose you. Speak, Florence! one word, in mercy. See, your hand is free: I clasp it no longer. It is here still! Florence, my own, my own!

"Yet, can it be? Am I not dreaming, as I have done so often, and shall I not awaken to the same bitterness?" he said, as, after a time, he sat beside me on the sofa, holding my hand, and gazing into my face with such deep tenderness that I dared not raise my eyes, lest they should meet his impassioned gaze.

"Oh, Florence! can you—do you, indeed, love me? Will you really give me this dear hand?"

"Yes!" I answered, in a low, trembling voice; "if, after what I have to tell you, you still wish for it."

"Tell me nothing, dearest. I know all that you would say."

I looked up wonderingly.

"Yes, dearest, *all*. I know that you were earnestly sought by one, whose faultless person and gallant bearing should have been warrant for a true heart; and who, after winning your regard for the qualities of which he only bore the semblance, presumed upon the power he thought he had, and did you cruel wrong. I know how you scorned and repulsed him; and I know how you suffered: not, as I think and hope, for him; but for the true loyal heart which you thought he possessed. You had imagined an idol, and you loved your own creation.

"And now, my own, let the subject never again be named between us. With all my heart I thank you for the confidence you were about to repose in me; I thank you for your faith in my love and devotion: but think of it no more. I will only tell you how I knew the story, and then dismiss it forever. I grudge the moments I waste upon any other subject than ourselves. *Ourselves!* Ah, Florence, what a blessed word that is!

"When I reached Paris, on my way to England, I met Mr. Temple, whom I had known at college. He was just married, to a woman who—if a woman ever can—justified his contempt and neglect; and he was most thoroughly wretched. In one of his rash confidences, he told me of his acquaintance with you, its commencement and its close: and if it can be any satisfaction to you to know that such a man feels penitent, you may have that assurance, dearest; for he is certainly both grieved and miserable."

At this moment, voices in the hall, warning us that dinner was over and the ladies were coming up, made me spring from the sofa in alarm; and as I did so, my father's letter fell upon the floor: the sight of it recalled me to my senses.

"That letter! Oh, how cruel I have been. And now they are coming, and we have settled nothing: what must I do?"

"Trust it to me, dearest. Come through this door: no one will see you; then go to your own room, and when you have thrown off these wrappers, come to me in the library. By that time I shall have read the letter—at least I will try—and shall be ready to advise you."

"But Philip expects you."

"Happy is he who expecteth nothing. I shall not visit the dining-room to-night: I'm too happy to sit with those eating and drinking fellows. You will not be long, dearest: I can not bear to have you long away."

"No," I replied; "but may I not go now? I am so anxious; and I have been so very selfish—so cruel. I shall be happier when something is done. May I go now?"

"May you? darling Florence, what a question! May you make me happy?" and drawing my arm within his own, and clasping the hand which thus lay before him, he led me down into the library.

"Now sit here: I must have you quite close to me, or I can't read. Take off that bonnet, dearest: there must be no veil between us now. You see how exacting I am become. I am so intensely happy. Now, then, for this letter."

"Just as I expected," he said, when he had read it. "This is no business for you, love: will you let me manage it?"

"If you will."

"Well, then, dearest; before I go upon this mission, you must let me talk to you in the quiet matter-of-fact way we used at Abberley; will you? Nay, do not bend your head down: I want to look at you. Well, as you will: perhaps I shall talk more rationally so. It will not be for long," and his arm glided round my waist, as he resumed.

"Of course you wish your father to be released from his captivity at once?"

"Of course," I murmured.

"Very well; it shall be done to-night. But there must be something more. I think I have permission now to speak frankly, dearest, have I not?"

"Always."

"Then I must tell you that I do not believe this money is owing, for the purpose Captain Sackville states. There are many, very many debts still unpaid, in connection with Ingerdyne; but they are chiefly those of tradespeople: the name of Levi is not (so I believe) among them."

"Debts! Tradespeople still unpaid? I hoped—I thought—oh, how negligent and wicked I have been not to inquire," I exclaimed, mournfully.

"My dearest, how were you to know? But now that you do know, something must be done. They must be paid at once, and with interest. If it takes half, or all, your fortune, Florence, it ought to be done."

"Yes, and it shall be; but you—"

"I will help you to the utmost. Henceforth, dearest, we are to have but one interest: when one can not pay, the other will; and when the banker's account of one falls short, the other will replenish it: that is arranged. But there is something else. We are bound, for justice and honor's sake, to pay the honest bills of honest

men; but not, as I think, the gambling and turf debts recklessly incurred by your father. Yet having done the one, he will naturally expect the other—unless some stipulation is made. And this it is, which, although so necessary to be done, it is impossible for you to do: and what I want you to intrust to me. Will you? Do not fear, dearest, that because I speak to you in this matter-of-fact style, I shall be rude or authoritative with your father. I shall remember that he is a gentleman, although a selfish one; and that you, on whose behalf I act, are his daughter. Will you trust me?"

"Always," I said again.

"Then I will go at once: the little good that we can do on earth should never be delayed. And when I return, Florence, you will see me here, will you not? I can not tell you of this before indifferent people. Besides, you must give me a few bright minutes for myself, in which to realize this deep, deep joy: to know and feel that you are my own—my very own—forever. Ah, Florence," he said, as rising, we stood together—and his voice sank into the low, rich tones which deep feeling always gives—"when I have thought of the possibility of this hour—that some day you and the husband of your choice would stand together as we do now, and that I should be as nothing to you—my very existence forgotten in the bliss of which I could have no share—I have almost prayed that I might die before it came. I have pictured all: seen you in fancy stand as now you do—listened to the words that he would speak—and have driven myself well nigh mad with my own fantasy; but now that it has come to pass—that I stand here filling the place it would have maddened me to see another fill, the words which came so readily when they only came to torture me, are gone. The vows and pledges, the burning words of love, the promises and thanks, have vanished; and I, who could so easily conjure up the professions of another, am now wordless for myself. I have none of the eloquence which men say ever comes with happiness: the simplest words of common thankfulness seem gone. I am as one who, heretofore in darkness, gazes for the first time on a rich world of treasure all his own. The suddenness of the joy, the breathless rapture, takes from him the power of speech; and he whose life is all absorbed in the new ecstasy, becomes dumb. I know, I feel, I see, that the one deep passion of my heart is realized; that at last your own true nature has pleaded for me, and that you love me, as I never dared to hope you would. Yet, I can say nothing. I can only feel and pray that God may bless us: that he may give me power to make your future life repay you for the past; that I may be his chosen instrument to bring you happiness and peace; and that loving, guiding, and protecting each other here, we may walk through life, as those who travel to eternity."

One passionate embrace, one kiss upon my brow—which lay almost hidden upon his shoulder—and he placed me again in the chair from which I had risen, and left me.

Quietly and slowly, subdued by this unexpected declaration, and the emotion of the last hour, I went late into my room.

How different, and yet how deep and fervent were the feelings I experienced now, compared to those reckless and strong ones, that had dis-

tinguished and tortured my former love. Then all was undisciplined passion or apprehensive fear—the whirlwind and the storm—a constant alternation of joy and misery: now all was peace: the quiet peace of assured happiness. I knew in whom I was trusting: long acquaintance had proved his worth and constancy, and in placing my earthly lot in his hands, I knew that it would be safe.

I might not, did not yet, love him with the passion I had felt toward Essex Temple; but with my whole heart I honored him; and love—the deep, quiet affection, which is born of trust and confidence—was fast growing in my heart.

This feeling was quite new to me; for Mr. Spencer was the only man I had ever seen in whose love there was at the same time the depth of tenderness and the fullness of repose. He was one of whom you could feel so safe; whose actions, springing from principle, were always so assured; it needed not to think or speculate upon what he would do: his path was always certain. Place him, try him how you might, you felt that he would never falter. The right, the honest, manly right, and never the merely politic, would have his fealty. Compared with him, I felt myself a poor, weak vacillating creature—infirm in all but pride and passion; and sinking on my knees, I humbly thanked God for the guidance under which he was about to place me, and prayed for grace to subdue all my own evil tendencies, and obey the good influences He had now suffered to prevail.

Under the softening influence of these feelings, I went down at last into Lotta's boudoir; a small, fairy-like chamber, at the end of the drawing-room suite, and buried myself in the soft cushions of her luxurious couch. A book lay open on my knee, and people, as they passed the door, fancying that I was reading, forbore to enter or interrupt me; so I was left alone to indulge in happy dreams and receive Mr. Spencer when he returned.

But, as hours passed on, and he did not come, I was beginning to feel alarmed; dreading that some outbreak had occurred; when I heard his voice in the outer room, rebutting Lotta's playful reproach for his tardy appearance. A few minutes devoted to her gay repartee and such explanations as he chose to give, and he was by my side, telling me all I had longed to hear.

He had found my father excited and angry: furious at having been obliged to remain so long in confinement, indignant at my ingratitude, and by turns exacting and scornful; at first, declaring that he would condescend to accept nothing from me, the next moment insisting upon Mr. Spencer agreeing, on my behalf, to pay all his debts. This, however, Mr. Spencer resolutely opposed: he willingly consented that I should liquidate all the claims left unsettled at Ingerdyne, but positively refused to allow me to pay a single debt incurred at the gaming table, or on the turf.

Upon first hearing this resolution, expressed with the quiet respectful manner of immovable determination, my father's passion was boundless: he became perfectly frantic; but when he discovered that Mr. Spencer was neither appalled by his rage, or intimidated by his threats, he gradually became composed and rational. Mr. Spencer then proposed the final arrangement;

which was, that, to enable my father to fulfill his desire of living abroad, I should pay off the whole of his Ingerdyne claims, and settle upon him an annuity of two hundred a year. To this, after much difficulty, and many cruel words, he consented; and it was agreed that Mr. Weatherby should be instructed to draw up the necessary documents, immediately upon the execution of which he should go abroad.

In the mean time, Mr. Spencer gave his check for the amount for which Mr. Isaacs held his prisoner in charge, as well as for another small detainer which had been lodged against him. My father was then set at liberty, and an appointment made between him and Mr. Spencer, to meet, on the third day after, at Mr. Weatherby's office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, to peruse and sign the deed of annuity.

"And now, dearest," said Mr. Spencer, when he had given me this long explanation, "you must leave town for a few days, until this matter is concluded. It will be much better that you should avoid seeing Captain Sackville, while he entertains his present opinion of your want of duty and proper pride in refusing to pay his enormous gambling debts; and the only way to prevent an interview, is for you to go out of town. It is a cruel necessity: a most ungracious return for all you have done, and are doing; but still we ought not (if it can be possibly avoided) to pain you, or exasperate your unhappy father more than is absolutely necessary. A meeting now would be fraught with bitterness and misery to both of you; and as he leaves England next week, it will be easy to avoid it."

And so it was decided: but before half had been said, that our hearts longed to speak and hear, the room was vacated, and every guest gone; while Lotta, tired and sleepy, came up to us with a yawn of fatigue, and bade us good-night.

"I shall see you early to-morrow, dearest," said Mr. Spencer, accepting this courteous hint, and drawing me into an outer room. "Let me find you in the library when I come: nobody ever goes there."

And with a parting word to Lotta he withdrew.

"What on earth ails you, and that unaccountable creature to-night, Flor?" asked Lotta, carelessly throwing off her costly wrist jewels; "you both seem bewitched. Has he been making love?"

"You shall know all to-morrow: see, here is Terèse. Good-night."

The morrow came, with its most unexpected confessions; and when Philip (to whom Lotta in her eager delight speedily told all) learned that I had accepted his friend, his hearty and affectionate congratulations affected me deeply. With both parents alive, I was to all intents and purposes an orphan; and in this most critical time of a woman's life, the only words of love and blessing that I should hear, were to be spoken by a cousin. No wonder that, as I thought of this, the tears dimmed my eyes and fell fast and heavily upon my hands.

"Nay, never weep, Flory," said Philip: "the dark hours of your life have passed, and day and sunlight have dawned. You have chosen wisely and well. Spencer is the man of all others best suited to you, and you must be happy. His character and principles are inestimable: a rock

upon which any woman may rest secure; and his position in H—shire, now he has thrown up that villainous profession, is as good as our own. I'm glad, Flor., you haven't taken a fancy to one of those new men: I couldn't bear to see you the wife of Mr. or Sir Somebody Yesterday, like that eighteen hundred baronet of Helen's. Spencer is as well born as we are; rich, good, and handsome: what could the heart of woman want more? Crying still! I hoped for a smile at least, if not a laugh: well, I suppose I must let you have your own way. I've heard you say that the mornings of the brightest days often come in with a shower, so weeping is no greater sign of grief, I hope, than heat drops are of rain. Hark! there is Spencer's voice. That's right, Flory; that bright blush will soon dry up the tears. How well you look: you are worthy of each other. God bless you, my dear cousin; may you be as happy as you deserve."

Then, after a moment's pause, he said, merrily:

"Now, good-by: I must go to him and receive his proposals in form. I am your guardian, you know: but I won't keep him long, so don't pout."

The next day, in obedience to the wish of Philip and Mr. Spencer, I went with Lotta to Richmond.

"I will not suffer you to be tortured and insulted, even by your father," said Philip, when the circumstances of the previous night were told to him. "Spencer is quite right: you must go out of town for a few days, while we manage the business; and as there can't be a better place than your friend Lady Wyndermere's at Richmond, I will ride down to-day, and accept her repeated invitations for you and Lotta."

"And now about these money affairs at Ingerdyne, they must be settled; and as it is for the honor and credit of our family, Flor., that it must be done, you and I must do it. I won't have a sou from Spencer. If your ready-money balance in your banker's hands fall short, I claim the right to make it up. No words, Flory; Lotta and I have decided it. You shan't go to Spencer with a shilling of encumbrance upon Forest Home; nor shall he help to pay off my uncle's debts. There, Mistress Cousin mine; no rebellion; you must begin to learn obedience."

"But, Philip—"

"But, Florence! I have made up my mind, fair lady, and the mind of a Vere is, as you ought to know, like the laws of the Medes and Persians."

"Of course, of course," said Lotta, who entered at this moment. "I don't at all know what you are talking about, good people, but I support my husband's authority. Don't oppose him, Flory, for it would be of no use; he will have his own way, and I can't help you; I am a perfect slave."

"I really can not consent."

"Well, never mind, I will for you. What is it all about? those horrid money matters? Why I thought that was settled ages ago. Of course you must do as Philip says; he and I arranged it hours and hours since. But really you can not be allowed to waste your time in this way, Florence; there are at least a hundred things to do. And first I want you in my dressing room; Lady Frances is there."

"But indeed, Lotta."

"And indeed, Florence! You must learn to do as you are bid, instead of talk, talk, talk in this fashion. You are becoming the most tremendous gossip; do pray be quiet and come with me," and taking my hand and talking all the way, she led me to Lady Frances.

Very earnest and affectionate, mingling warning with benison, were the few sweet congratulatory words of Lady Frances Hastings. Mr. Spencer had always been a great favorite with her, and she warmly approved my choice, and appreciated my good fortune. Still, looking as she ever did from the present to the future, she sought, even in this hour of gladness, to suggest thoughts of coming responsibilities.

"But you embrace them cheerfully, Florence, knowing what they are; and fear not, God will be with you. Trust Him; rely upon Him: and, be the future what it may, His strength will be sufficient for you. Nay dear girl, I did not mean to make you sad, or cloud your brow. A brilliant time, full of gayety and happiness, is coming; few will have the courage, even if they have the inclination, to break in upon it with grave and sober words. The world has a mistaken idea that the few weeks before a girl becomes a wife—taking upon herself the most important and sacred duties of life—should be spent in a whirl of flattery, folly and pleasure; but not so would I have you, Florence, go to the altar. You have fought a brave fight hitherto, and by God's grace protecting you, have won it. Take the same guide now; walk humbly with Him, who has so loved, so shielded you; and while your heart is gladdened with the deep joy He has vouchsafed to bestow, do not forget the Giver in the gift; nor provoke Him with the rash thoughtless folly which so often distinguishes girls in your position. But you will not; I know you will not; you have been chastened in the fire of affliction, and are, I truly believe, purified; therefore I prophesy that in the new life upon which you are entering, you will be blessed and happy. Remember how I predicted this hour, long, long ago; and trust me for the future."

After luncheon, Philip, according to his promise, rode down to Richmond to ask Lady Wyndermere's hospitality for us; and, as I expected, he brought to Lotta and myself the most pressing invitations. Early the following day, therefore, we left town, and when we reached Broadwaters, we found the countess in a state of great excitement and happiness.

"Give me joy, give me joy," she exclaimed, almost immediately after our greeting. "I am so happy; I have just received a letter from my dear boy, announcing his engagement to the most charming girl in England. Conceive my happiness; and just at the time too, when I had begun to despair of his ever marrying at all."

"I understood Lord Wyndermere was abroad," said Lotta.

"So he is: he went to Italy, in a fit of pique against somebody or other, two years since; and no persuasions could induce him to return. I am very thankful, now, that he did not; for, by a happy chance, he met Grace Lyndon traveling with her brother and his wife on the continent, and fell in love with her."

"Grace Lyndon! Sister to Mr. Hugh Lyn-

don, member for South W——shire?" I asked, eagerly.

"Yes, do you know her, that your eyes sparkle so? Ah, Florence! once I had a hope that you would be my daughter. You would have suited my dear Harold admirably; and I am almost afraid that, charming as she is, Grace will be too simple and meek for her position as his wife. But do you know her?"

"Oh, yes; the oldest friend I have is married to her brother. I know her very well. This will bring them to England, of course?"

"Yes; Harold writes me word that they are even now *en route*. I am to address my next letter to him in Paris; we may therefore expect to see them at some time during the next fortnight. But how selfish I have been," she said, suddenly recollecting my new position, "talking of nothing but myself, and forgetting you. Pray, pray forgive me, Florence: this is worse than storming you at Forest Home. Accept my warmest congratulations. Unfortunately I have only the advantage of a very slight acquaintance with Mr. Spencer; but I know that he is a great favorite of my sister Frances, and to all who know you, Florence, it must be sufficient assurance of his worth to learn that he is your choice."

During this week and the next, satisfactory arrangements were concluded between my father and Mr. Spencer; so that when I returned to town, I had the unexpected gratification of finding a letter from the former, frankly acknowledging the liberal spirit with which the affairs had been conducted, and (more affectionately than I could have hoped), giving his consent to my engagement.

Strangely as his letter was worded, there were yet evident traces in it of the working of a better spirit than formerly. To a stranger, the words would have seemed cold and ungracious (I was going to say ungrateful, forgetting that a parent can never owe that duty to his child); but to me there appeared an evident softening of tone and feeling: a certain gentleness, apparent not so much in what was said, as in what was left unsaid; and I hailed the omen joyfully.

My mother, to whom Mr. Spencer and I had written, immediately answered the letters; but rather less cordially than I had hoped: although she expressed no disapprobation, and wished us every happiness.

"She didn't want you to marry, but hoped you would be an old maid, and leave your money to Helen's children," said Lotta, throwing down the letter, which she had insisted upon reading. "Well, it's horribly wicked and undutiful, I dare say; but I am glad those amiable people are going to be disappointed."

But of all those to whom this engagement gave pleasure, none was more delighted than Mrs. Spencer. Dear, good, old lady, how she petted and indulged me: humoring every fancy and forestalling every wish; lavishing upon me the rarest and most costly things, and caressing me with the same fondling, protecting tenderness one feels toward an infant.

At her own urgent request, I consented to accept my *trousseau* from her; and her magnificent and lavish orders amazed even the fashionable artists whom she employed. At first, I strove to restrain this excessive liberality, but

soon found the attempt was useless; she would have her own way.

"Nonsense, Flory!" she said, upon my expostulating against the extravagant prices she was giving for some lace. "Who has a better right to fine things than you have? I can't give you money, because you have plenty; but I will give you the handsomest things money will buy; you have made me very, very happy, and I feel as if I could not do enough to show you how thankful I am. Besides, who's to have my money if you are not? I promised it to you years ago. So say no more, Flory; say no more; except to tell these people what you want; you shall have it, be it what it may."

Finding my remonstrances unavailing, and that I could not decline them without giving her great pain, I was constrained to accept her costly presents.

CHAPTER LX.

ONE day, about a month after the time of which I have been writing, I was occupied in looking over some papers connected with the Ingerdyne affairs, when Mrs. Lyndon was announced; and, before I could rise to receive her, she was in the room. It would not be easy to say whose delight at this meeting was the greatest; I certainly showed it the most; but then, she was always so calm and well disciplined.

"Oh! dear Miss Northey!" I exclaimed—I could never get over the early habit of calling her by that beloved name—"how glad I am that you are come! It seems such a very long time since we parted; and how much has happened during that time! Who could have thought, when last we met, that I should ever return to my old place again?"

"Who, indeed, Florence? But there have been greater changes than that. Death has been busy with many of us."

A glance at her mourning-dress recalled to my memory the recent losses she had sustained, in her own mother, as well as Mr. Lyndon's. With a conscience full of remorse for my neglect in not having alluded to these events, I began some words of heart-felt apology; but she stopped me, saying,

"Do not reproach yourself, Flory; people one does not know, however good they may be, can not be expected to live in our memory; especially at such a time as this. Let us leave all painful reflections, and talk of yourself. I am very anxious to see your betrothed: is he in town?"

"No, he is at Aston, making some arrangements. But when did you return?"

"Yesterday. Do you know who came with me?"

"Yes; Lord Wyndermere, I suppose, and his *fiancée*. Do you like him? Is he clever, good, amiable—what you approve?"

"Scarcely, in all things; but you know he is an old friend of yours."

"Mine? I never saw him in my life!"

"Not since he was Lord Wyndermere; but when he was Lord Glendale—"

"Glendale; do forgive me for this abominable rudeness of repeating your words!—but is Lord Glendale Lady Wyndermere's son?"

"Yes; did you not know it? How strange! He used to be always talking of you to me."

"Indeed! Well, I hope that he talks and thinks of no one now but your good and pretty sister."

"No; he is wonderfully engrossed, certainly; which, I confess, surprises me not a little: dear Grace is the last person I should have thought suited to his taste. She is so meek and humble, and he is so fiery and impetuous. I hope she will retain his love; but there is a fearful difference between them: you would have made the best countess, Flory. How was it that you refused him?"

"How do you know that I did?"

"Because he told me: you must have had some strong reason; for he is a very attractive person, besides being an earl; which, in the circumstances in which you were then placed, was, of itself, no slight recommendation."

"None to me."

"Well, surely, it was no disparagement. There must have been some powerful reason to induce a proud girl like you to remain on the stage, in preference to accepting the coronet of one of the oldest earls in England. What was it, Florence? I ask for the sake of Grace; what was sufficient to cause your refusal of him, might be sufficient, also, to cause hers."

"No, indeed; Lord Glendale and I parted in perfect amity. Had he been an emperor, instead of a simple earl, I should not have accepted him. There were circumstances at the time, which, irrespective of Lord Glendale's merits, made it impossible that I should accept him."

"Thank you, Florence. I have always had a fear that your rejection of his suit had some deeper cause; that he was a gambler, or—"

"Oh, no, no! I am quite sure that he is not," I said; eagerly catching at any thing upon which I could speak positively, and without embarrassment or equivocation. "I have repeatedly heard, from his mother and many other persons, that he dislikes the gaming-table, and is wholly indifferent to the turf."

"But now tell me about yourself; how you are, and what you have been doing, that only one of my letters has been answered. You must have been moving about continually."

And now followed those long and necessary explanations, which, although most interesting to the parties concerned, are so apt to bore others. When they were over, the whole morning was gone.

"What are you going to do now, Flory?" asked Mrs. Lyndon. "Can you take me home? I sent my carriage away when I came."

"Oh, yes; I should like it of all things! Where are you staying?"

"In York-terrace. Hugh is there now; he has come up from Shrewsbury, by favor of Dr. Kenyon, to spend a few days with us. I have not seen him for two years."

When we reached York-terrace, the first person I encountered, upon entering the drawing-room, was Lord Glendale. I had forgotten the probability of meeting him there, and was greatly annoyed at my thoughtlessness; especially as I observed Mrs. Lyndon's penetrating eye instantly fixed upon him. For a moment, there was a perceptible embarrassment in his manner.

but he shook it off immediately; and, advancing with perfect self-possession, said,

"How happy I am to see you again, Miss Sackville! and not the less that I have the satisfaction of doing so in your proper sphere. I have much to congratulate you upon!"

This speech put me at my ease at once, and I replied,

"Thank you. I also have congratulations to offer; which I do most sincerely. Pray, present me to Miss Lyndon; I fear that she has forgotten me."

"That would be impossible," he said, courteously, but without the slightest tinge of gallantry; "but here she is. Grace, Miss Sackville thinks that you have forgotten her."

"Oh, no!" she replied, coming forward, with a bright blush upon her cheek; and fixing

her mild blue eyes inquiringly upon me; then, with a timid glance, turning them upon her lover.

What she read there, I do not know; but the good effect was instantaneous; the bright blush became brighter and deeper; the doubtful look vanished, and her manner became at once frank and cordial. She was evidently greatly relieved; and I learned afterward, that, knowing from Lord Glendale of his former attachment, she had looked forward with extreme anxiety to this first interview with its object.

Surrounded by all my firmest and dearest friends, there was now no further excuse for delaying my marriage; and, therefore, three months from the day upon which Mrs. Lyndon returned, I stood before the altar in the old parish church at Ingerdyne—a bride!

THE END.





